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ABC
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A Modern Prometheus





07



Colosseum, Rome, Italy

3

A MODERN PROMETHEUS

by
Martha Gilbert Dickinson Bianchi

*Author of "Within the Hedge,"
"The Cathedral," etc.*



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MAR 10

A MODERN PROMETHEUS

*Partially written within the gates of Perugia
and beneath the shadows of the monastery
of Assisi, is fondly*

*DEDICATED TO THOSE WHO
INSPIRED ITS COMPLETION*



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CHAPTER I

THE WANDERERS

FROM Perugia Italy lies like a sea at your feet. Scattered over the Umbrian valleys rise the rocky peaks supporting other mediæval towns, battered and scarred, whose fortifications now hold at bay no fiercer hordes than the varying seasons or striving winds.

Between them, the two great roads lead down to Rome; solemnly invite to the Eternal City her ancient and insuperable rival in arrogant pretensions to the claim of the Papal See; and between them also the green tides of growth flow in the tender Italian springtime; or the winter noon looks down on the Tiber out in flood—a line of steely silver upon that same winding plain that seems a stage for the pageants of the changing year on which the dwellers of the heights never weary of gazing. At night the scattered lights of these distant villages throw a gleam like that of some remote island flash far out at sea, carrying a hint a humanity across the silence to the watchful heart, and the sun rises from those dim receding levels as from his veritable ocean bed.

But it is when the April rains spring up and wind the whole expanse in sheets of soft grey mist, that one can almost hear the fog bells far below, and from his own position high up amid scudding clouds fancy the earth beneath to have suddenly been transformed to mid-ocean. So perfect is the illusion of the lost distance.

To world-worn travellers perhaps there is no one memory of Europe more refreshing than this corner of the parapet where the garden of the little Brufanni lays a vision of the world at one's pleasure. Only an Umbrian world surely, but whoever desired another, once under the spell of those fading purple atmospheres of peace?

To the girl who was leaning there among the roses this April morning, it had already become memorable. She knew intuitively it would become unforgettable. It soothed her, charmed her, absorbed her to the exclusion of all immediate surroundings or herself; this last had proved the environment hitherto most difficult to ignore far away sat her mother, writing busily, elaborate leather and silver paraphernalia about her on garden chairs, her parasol stuck between them, and her back full on the landscape. Her daughter often wished those letters got so perfectly the feel

successive experience—they seemed so oftener than otherwise to have been written with back full turned to the view!

For an hour they had been thus characteristically occupied. One staring off to the horizon, letting her thoughts drift free with her gaze and then float back across the green sea of open country like idle boats at turning of the tide—to keel against the rose-covered parapet at last and then to swiftly sign for another voyage toward the liquid far-away. The other driving her pen at break-neck pace over page after page of semi-diaphanous paper, without lifting her eyes save from inkstand to parasol; as the adventurous sun grew more impatient to read over her shoulder. Finally she sighed, jabbed the careless parasol into more faithful relations to the intruder, folded her many sheets, stuck Victor Emmanuel's blue face on the corner of the envelope with a decisive pound of her small fist, and was just about to seal it when her daughter turned toward her.

"Read it to me, mother," she said. "I want to hear you describe the view with your back to it; I do believe you see with your imagination better than with your eyes. I never feel I know what we have been seeing or are going to see until you write home to Summerfield about it."

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“You have grown very indolent about expressing yourself, Clare.” The older woman shook her head reproachfully as she spoke.

“My mind accepts; it does not formulate any more; please read it to me,” she entreated. Her mother demurred a little, smiled and complied. She was fond of employing her powers of description and sometimes even regretted that life had not compelled her to test her literary abilities in the unprejudiced scales of poverty. She accepted the flattery of her daughter’s request with a gracious little bow, and began immediately to read.

The girl’s face followed every phrase of the letter intently, in complete sympathy. Lighting a pretty touch of nature, shrugging when a wjest hit home, warming at the affectionate passages regarding herself. They were unusual moods, these two. As the mother’s voice fell she dashed at a forgotten item written diagonally across the page, already crossed as if to increase confusion farther, Clare quoted softly to herself a sentence that had lingered in her fancy:

“‘Our minds are coloured with Venetian; our ears swim in serenades,—during the time we have been idling in Italian highways, wandering in Thuringen, settling a month in dear, sunny Firenze——’”

“What are we doing now, mother dear?” she asked suddenly. “Until now I seem to know, to understand what it has all meant, but now we have come to the place where the past ends, and the whole earth is spread out before us as it was before the Lord once upon a time when the Devil was young. You know I have said always that the temptation in the wilderness was the temptation never to go back.”

“You would not want to go back?” The question slipped out unconsidered.

“No, let us stay in our beautiful wilderness.”

“Until to-morrow!” The older woman smiled incredulously. “Let me see,” she cried. “You were never going away from Orvieto,—and we left next day!”

“Poor wine and cold rooms,” replied Clare.

“You wanted to take an apartment in Sienna and have a piano: we only remained long enough to pay for it all a month in advance!”

“A depressing old town it was, too!”

“In Florence you pined to be up at sunset-Fiesole.”

“That was because the neighbours arrived at Florence.”

“In Fiesole——”

"It was not half so picturesque as to stop in Florence and look up at Fiesole."

"In Perugia——"

"No, this is different. I have had an instinct for Perugia all the time," interrupted the daughter. "I knew it must exist to meet my need; just such a dream of an Italian town, and it does; I am triumphant. I want to stay here always."

"Until it rains, that is!" retorted her mother with a shrug. "At least I shall not unpack the smallest one of my trunks until we have lunched. That ceremony may change all your disposition toward Perugia, as it has on repeated occasions in the past."

"Let us go and see by all means," urged the younger, and they strolled off in the direction the Brufani, where the gong had been some time since lusty in its invitation, the prancing lion the arms of Perugia waving in the Square, giving his tail an unwonted kink in the breeze and his tongue an unholy curl as he watched them had seen many a signora cross that Piazza time, but these two suited his taste uncomparably well, and he resolved to ramp more out than ever on their next appearance, to remind them of the proximity of an admirer in the old memento of a city!

There was a tenderness in the mother's voice, a devotion in the daughter's manner as her tall figure stooped a trifle to bring her eyes on a level with the darker ones of her mother as they walked, that indicated even to the casual observer that sense of something special, of distinction; that something indefinable and rare,—setting them apart, distinguishing them without the least claim being made on their part to such consideration. There was about them that something which is often the outward expression of deep affection or silent suffering,—those two indisputable refiners of unrelieved human nature.

Either woman would have accepted torture to spare the other, as a matter too natural to provoke a question; yet neither found it simple to talk of their devotion or turn over together the cause of the involuntary wandering. That a cause existed, no one who saw them together could reasonably doubt. They had nothing about them of the typical American on a European rampage,—whose joy is constituted in great part of curiosity and heightened appreciation of things-as-they-are-at-home. Nothing about them tokened the embryo novelist compiling copy in remote but salable districts, whose local colour should afford a make-shift to cover a lack of originality and style. They were

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equally guiltless of the white umbrellas that dot the Italian wayside. They seemed as innocent of fads as Europeans, and as devoid of the national hurry so advertising even the most leisurely of their countrywomen abroad.

That they were Americans all who glanced might read. The figure of the daughter, the unsurpassed charm of the mother; the labels on their trunks, even their smart little boots, and the manner in which their trim belts tilted in the latest Parisian mode, bespoke their nationality as frankly as if a kilt of stripes and blouse of stars had girt them round. Not that the *ensemble* was voluble or pronounced or over-done; on the contrary, a quiet dignity harmonised with an impression of reserve often found in the women of the old South in their own country and the best of the New England types.

Clare, the daughter, had married Count Varian after a brief European courtship during a gay summer of rapid progress from one smart watering place to another in brilliant succession,—withdrawing from a little group at Trouville only to find herself surrounded by new circles of admirers at Aix-les-Bains, finding herself the dominating spirit in the coterie at St. Moritz, as she had been earlier in the season at the brink of the Italian lakes where her sudden passion had been assisted to ;

overmastering sway by the moonlight on Como and the odours of heliotrope.

The marriage that followed was scarcely consummated before she knew it was a fundamental mistake. A discovery she made almost before the real orange blossoms in her wedding crown had faded; they last unwithered for a week at best on the Riviera, by the way, while passion-flowers may die in a night. Having, like all the endless procession of maids before her, promised for better, for richer, and in health, she was somewhat embittered to find that Fate had reserved for her the shadows of these glowing conditions; deceived her into poorer, and for worse. There are many girls who would have found compensation for a shattered dream in the elaborate trousseau or the novelty of the newly-worn title, or the mad beauty of a Riviera springtime, with love to intensify all. To Clare the door of Paradise had on that one supreme occasion opened,—and shut,—leaving her, to her own infinite bewilderment, outside. True, her Adam was with her: which heightened instead of mitigating her desolation. Like the child in the poem she might have cried out:

“Lost or strayed from Paradise,
A little girl with woman’s eyes!
Who will take her by the hand
And lead her back to Fairyland?”

When the loneliness of a wedded companionship first overwhelmed her she was confused, then incredulous. Later she looked back upon that earlier time with pity for her own ignorance, mingled with humiliation over her later acceptance of the inevitable conditions that surrounded her. Why had no one warned her? her soul demanded angrily. Then pride crushed back her impulse for flight at any cost, and resentment against all social systems in general and her own false position in particular, forced her to rouse her will to support an evil bravely where she had hoped to honour the unspeakably dear.

She began to look at all women with startled eyes wondering if they, too, were concealing burning hearts and outraged sentiment. Her mother she exonerated. Her mother was innocent as she, but there were other women who must have known who might have spoken, might have saved her why had they preserved the secret of her sex; its bondage until it was too late? Resentment made her cruel in her judgment of their cowardice. It was all a common enough experience with difference, that Clare herself was not cowardly. She herself gave the exceptional element to the tragedy, alas! not exceptional. Christened Clare for a maiden aunt who lived and died promisingly alone in her native New Eng

lage; inheriting Southern blood from her Virginia father; educated in the worldiest of schools life could offer, she had yet managed to preserve an untainted nature amid the most conventional and contradictory of influences. She was variously talented, and had read widely in three or four languages. She was quoted as having said once in defence of her latitudes that to her mind innocence was vastly preferable to ignorance. Yet of real human nature's poisoned blood she had remained innocently ignorant,—defenceless.

Because of this wilful familiarity with all manner of books, from all manner of sources, she had supposed herself a woman of the world—even to the comprehension of man and his folly. Her girl friends had stimulated this conclusion, considering her more deeply versed than they in many mysteries. She had been loved often and seriously. She had been unanimously conceded to be out of the ordinary—a born heroine. Unconsciously she had appropriated the groove cut for her, the dramatic element in her becoming more strongly defined as life afforded her one striking situation after another. She had that personal magnetism that so eludes dissection. Men rarely knew they loved her until they had lost the power to live without her. She never exerted herself to win, yet her atmosphere held a seduction all its own. One

felt a hidden force, the stronger for its unrevealed capacity.

Of the talents vouchsafed her she was strangely indifferent. Had she been of sufficient inspiration to love hard work, her violin had not gone unstrung, her clay dried up, or her publishers fretted over the phenomenon of a mere girl who could be published and wasn't! She had the absorption of genius, too, forgetful of duty and dinner alike, once the trance of creation did descend upon her and the rapt contemplation of some beauty of sound or sight that filled her cup of life to the overflowing brim. Everything had seemed possible when Love should light the torch that was to set her soul aflame within, to produce her masterpiece!

And this marriage was what Fate had been holding in reserve for her! Before the disillusion of all her life accretions were as nothing. Her tears were just like any other woman's tears, although they were the first that had forced their way over her cheeks since her childish grief over her father's astounding death. Tears that, being so unaccommodated, frightened her more than the reason of flowing, so haggard and distorted did life she had become, so lost the old bright valour and habitual self.

Her temperament that had found so easy

in the flowery warmth of Variani afforded her no compensation in sensuous ecstasies for her shamed modesty or appalled discoveries of dishonour. After all, it was her mother who had proved to be the heroine. Her mother, who had never been a matrimonial advocate, but who had not opposed this marriage or approved it—knowing Clare. What her own faithful, buried over-husband would have done and been able to do had he stood in her place had been at once her torment and inspiration. Much as a wise sea-captain stands on his wakeful bridge and noting signs of “weather” ahead is prepared to lower the life-boats at a signal’s warning or to go below and smile assurance upon the stricken passengers, she had stood during the two dubious years of her daughter’s precarious voyage with Count Variani that had ended in utter shipwreck. She had offered no advice; given no orders. Ready but silent until the number of bells struck the hour that meant decisive action. Then she it was who effected the separation, with an urbanity that convinced the erring Count she at least must have occult foreign blood in her veins, almost causing him to regret his choice of the listless Clare before her spirited mother.

Throughout the intricate negotiation she controlled events and assumed mutual attitudes with

a high-handed and impersonal demeanour worthy of a Napoleon or an able woman; perpetually debonair and disarming.

“Nothing bourgeois about her!” her worsted son-in-law had been heard openly to declare, with a marked accent on the personal pronoun full of lurking insult in its insinuation, yet with a reluctant flattery for the fencer who had outfenced him with his own smooth weapons.

That Clare was bourgeois he had proved to her upon innumerable occasions. Whenever a principle was at stake his own nobility impressed him strikingly in contrast to her hopeless provinciality. Principles that were to her as the very foundation of an unalterable being were by him honoured only in breach.

To him certain sins were human, their indulgence noble, if not divine, only because nobility ranked his soft eyes as infinitely higher. The laxity certain of the Contessas and Principessas formed their daily circle was to him but the mark of the *vraie grande dame de monde*,—fingering in her a continuous rebellion of criticism and dislike. Another of his dearest grievances was the casual manner with which she alluded to her courtiers,—“as if they were mere daughters of the people,—one of the Jones girls,—or an

can"! Her inability to comprehend the honour done her by the patronage grudgingly extended her by so mighty a personage as an illegally divorced and often remarried Baronessa, infuriated him. Her indifference toward the significance of the heirdom of some decrepit little realm of forgotten coast of the Italian kingdom, amazed him. It made him ridiculous to have her condemn these aristocratic law-givers. Her face did it after her tongue had been peremptorily silenced. It was for her to concur with grace and gratitude. It was *gaucherie* past supporting to have her fail in understanding her natural pleasure as his wife,—nay more,—his Countess. She had presumed to refuse roulette her roof's sheltering, finding it installed in the servants' quarters, and had been given to understand once and for all that her servants' morals were nothing to her; immorality was their own matter, gambling included. She had been shown with modesty and tact how indelicate her intrusion upon such subjects must appear, even to her husband; it had been fondly revealed to her as to some wilful young Magdalen that such interference would instantly de-class her among well-born women; her indiscretion was slurred over but unforgotten.

He soon despaired of her as a *grande dame*, and mourned in a carefully chosen public over the fallacy

of that much-vaunted adaptability of the American woman—which he had found so lamentably wanting in the offspring of the free. An old Roman, not a Spartan, he was poetic, but not an idealist; musical, but not a musician; dazzling, but not enduring. In matters of honour she was a child of the true democracy—which disgusted him. In matters of taste she was an aristocrat—which puzzled him. Her contradictory nature amused him after his first curiosities were satisfied, and he was haunted long after their final parting by a sense of something in her that had escaped him despite his brutal forcing of intimacies and compelling of revelation. There is in reality a haughtiness of soul surpassing a pride of birth. This he did not know.

While events were thus unrolling themselves from the scroll of the gods among the rose Nice and Monte Carlo, the people of Sumner Mass., talked themselves out and forgot, except odd moments when they wondered and again. It seemed to these old neighbours Reynolds family that all had happened as always known it would. It was dramatic. They had predicted it and they had not been vain. The natural pride of the prophet of his prophecy. They thought of the “Greenland’s icy mountains” was sung

bath morning, shivered for the dreariness of marrying a foreigner who presumably inhabited these same bleak wastes of their psalmody—and speedily forgot again.

The farmers' wives who drove in to do their weekly trading at the village centre looked apprehensively at the old Reynolds mansion, for many generations set exclusively apart behind its high walls of shrubbery, very much as they were wont to look at houses wherein a corpse was briefly known to lie. The old place had come in for a share of local legend. It had now become the silent partner in Clare's spectacular marriage, receiving a renewal of interest from the passer-by which distance prevented them from bestowing upon the actual family. Those were the days when the old caretaker became a character of public importance and the under-gardener found everyone prepared to loiter away the hours over the nailed gateways in exchange of personal reminiscence,—old servants, of course, never descending to the vulgarity of idle gossip that demeans. They sighed heavily as they parted; after these rich half hours it seemed the proper conclusion to the topic that was sure to be the last they touched upon. It wiped out any personal enjoyment of the subject—that sigh—which would have been equally offensive to their con-

sciousness of entire devotion to the interests of the absent. They accepted sympathy, if they must, but insisted on sympathy in distinction from curiosity.

If the marriage had turned out well Summerfield would have been decorous, but disappointed. He was patient for evil development, but strong in his own conviction of coming scandal. Not that he was intentionally unkind or unchristian; it was true to itself and other kindred villages, where assistance at a nativity or a conflagration is more cordially bestowed than mere trivial joy over the prosperity of the fortunate or happiness of the easily infatuated, and where there are three to lay out to half a one to cheer the daily path to the tomb.

From the first, Summerfield had waited. Still unassuaged, undeceived. Unfortunately details had been woefully lacking; scant even in the most quarters, which was worse. The facts, however, were what Summerfield felt they ought to have been and so gradually they forgot again, and the hocks grew tall in the garden till they seemed summer lighthouses for the mariner bees, and they steered a humming course above the fragrant sweetness, and the birds dared to perch on the porches, and none save the rain and

and young gardeners trod the gravel paths until Summerfield remembered again and spoke its mind, declaring it was high time Mrs. Reynolds brought Clare home. There would have been more local rejoicing over this one sinner that relented than over many a real returning Prodigal; but the year slipped by with the annuals and birds for the only inhabitants of the old place behind its shrubbery walls.

Occasionally a riotous plantain grew and spread where no plantain ever grew before. Timothy grass invaded a sacred peony bed or a scrag purple aster pushed its way up like smoke among the trees and escaped the relaxing vigilance of the stern old gardener—a band of silent witnesses to an unwonted freedom in high places. For three seasons the hollyhocks had stood waiting, valiantly shoulder to shoulder, their brilliant hues like a gaily caparisoned home-guard of some imperial regiment; the chestnut blooms smothered the glistening July air a while with their musks before they dropped to arabesque the lawns in fantastic patterns very exasperating to the younger gardener's rake; still no one came.

For three seasons the bees had fumbled at the mignonette, the nasturtiums flashed across the grass like an overturned loving cup of the gods.

Three times the autumn had burned among the woodbines and tinged the asters to match the deepened azure of the sky, and finally, tired of her glory, sated in her own colour, let her frosty decree go forth and blacken the gorgeous mass that overran the garden.

The leaves fell slowly down, but hid no footprints. The squirrels scattered their nuts unrebuked, betting querulously among themselves when the garret windows would again give access to the coveted winter refuge of their chattering community. At last the snow silenced all save a band of brigand bluejays, undaunted by storm or solitude; and still the wanderers did not return.

In the long, dark evenings the younger gardener sometimes went to sit a while in the warm kitchen of the old gardener, who had been the "younger gardener" once himself, in his day. After they had dutifully discussed the interests of their own world they somehow always came out on the same subject.

"Miss Clare was handsome, as I recollect," the younger would suggest—and the older would nod decidedly, then remark as if to cover his hasty admission, "She was called so."

"Proud though, always; took after both sides of her family in that respect. Her father was proud

before her, I have heard folks say"—waiting for encouragement.

"I don't know as he was more so than her mother," the old man would dissent.

"I should most suppose they would be likely to come home——" as he rose to go.

"Well, I should and then again I shouldn't." And then they would both sigh that final sigh which was like a bunch of dried flowers cast on the memory of a dutifully regretted defunct.

CHAPTER II

IN THE CLOISTERS

PERUGIA bore the test of the long windy afternoon that followed the morning on the parapet better than its discarded predecessors had done. When weary of idling away the hours, clinging like lizards wherever the sun happened to lie warm upon a wall,—for the air was chill yet and the winds keen,—the wanderers became absorbed in the external features of the steep streets and their mediæval suggestions, Clare's spirits apparently more trustworthy than for a long season. Here they found the familiar characteristics that resemble the scenes in any Italian opera come to life, giving only a secondary flavour to the sharply picturesque, for the city itself is unique. Something grim, a sense of the survival of blood and war, lingers in the atmosphere, overwhelming the ordinary features of spurred officers, women peeping under crafty jalousies, the vistas of courtyards, the gates and innumerable towers of defence, and the friendly bell's irregular ringing to assure one of their watchfulness when darkness falls over

the garden of the Brufani. Those bells whose voice is fatherly in all strange lands, promising protection to the faithful; the same blessing from whatever tower it chimes; the same password in whatever language it is given to the listening heart.

Perugia is honeycombed with arches,—whether one looks down the winding stairway of the Via Appia through its heavy frame of gateway, in the crevice of whose crumbling stone the starveling flowers blown hither by the winds have clung and bloomed, or along the dark thirteenth century streets where the palaces lean across overhead in the manner of the Bridge of Sighs,—one succeeding another, with patches of furtive light venturing between, and at the very end a low-arched gateway wondrously carved, giving access to yet another series, as the town abruptly drops to lower levels of terraces beneath, or ascends obliquely to the cathedral square which is its crown.

“On earth the broken arc,
In heaven the perfect sphere,” *Keats*.

Clare had quoted softly as they stood in one of the precipitous streets, their eyes involved in the curves of arch after arch, vista within vista, only recovering their actual standpoint by an involved process

of retrograde action, resembling the strategy of the swallow flight at evening.

It is sad in its impression, this Umbrian stronghold. Tinged with the silence that follows great eventfulness, in which there is always much of reaction, lacking in buoyancy or hope. Like a woman whose past is her boast, she remains now, this Perugia, in her crumbling beauty. But men do not fight over her, and her gates no longer have need to be firm closed at nightfall, nor the iron chains to be stretched across her highways as of old—for her favour is no longer the supreme prize of the covetous!

From Perugia, Italy lies like a sea at your feet, embraced in sunshine caresses or mysterious ingathering storms. From Italy beneath, Perugia shines down from above as a minor milky way of twinkling constellation flashing out of the Southern night. By day, brooding like a sullen Menead ^{maload} on her lofty rock, over those vital periods of her history when Popes and nobles vied to stain her stor with their patrician blood.

No martial din obscures the prattle of Pissar fountain in the square to-day, for the Becc^t and Raspanti are reconciled in death, and the bulent spirits are hushed in their graves. O! incessant wind batters the church door; Po

their people sleep well in their storied niches or under the open sky of their hillside Campo Santo, their victories and banishments alike forgot. The waters that drip over the marble basin of the fountain croon only of their source in Monte Pinciano—those low, soft hillsides where springtime brings back the white heath and the crimson-touched arbutus, and where in rough and massive masonry their life is hoarded in cool, green caverns. They will lisp on uninterrupted. Barbarism and glory have alike departed. As a torch extinguished, Perugia stands.

Perhaps to a woman overborne by a sorrowful memory there is something naturally sympathetic in ruins, or in their wistful hint of passions past. It seemed to be so in Clare's case, and night brought her dreams of far-away violet banks interwoven with the immediate surroundings, far more restful than the sickening experiences lived and relived in her recently unreposeful slumbers.

Sometimes there comes a day when, apropos of nothing at all, the mere physical joy of living gets into one's veins, setting at naught all that would gainsay its blithesomeness. The day following proved such. It had been decided to make a pilgrimage to Assisi. Now, behold in the radiance of the morning a powerful grey horse and open



vettura with the typical Antonio as driver standing at the door. The important *concierge* was in waiting to add his own rug for the American knees, murmuring in excuse for the liberty of his attention "Americans are ever so cold, so very cold!" his bold eyes full of admiration for his departing guests, and visions of extra *pourboire* sure to reward his solicitous care of their comfort on the return at evening.

The maid and upstairs waiter leaned far out of the window to watch them start. The little page stood in the doorway with their own downstairs waiter, and the *maitre d'hôtel* handed them to their carriage with the manner of the Lord Mayor. They were profoundly cautioned against one *albergo* at Assisi and warmly encouraged toward its rival; warned repeatedly to pay Antonio nothing till their safe return; bade to beware the chill wind that would surely rise as the sun went down, and to drink only the *vin da pays*—all with a gay seriousness. Salutations were impressively and heartily exchanged; the grey horse broke into a sharp trot and they looked back to see the respectful little group still bareheaded and bowing after the gallant and leisurely manner of holiday Italy.

The road pitched off the terrace on which Perugia is built, whirled by a series of wit

zigzags, then fell down the hills through the spring greens. White oxen were ploughing, leaving the open furrows breathing of fecundity, of juvenescence. Horse-chestnut trees in feathery bloom to see under; hawthorne hedges white and fragrant to look over. Off for Assisi, Spring leading the way and the spirit of Italy flying before. Etruscan tombs they would none of, when Antonio drew rein in tourist fashion and gave them their cue in a perfunctory voice. All in vain did he urge them thither, this being the customary first halt upon the route, giving a half hour's *siesta* for the driver; neither of them was disposed to break the spell of the "ride on, forever ride" mood of the dash down the morning toward the unknown. The green, glacial river, tearing away on its course beneath the greener willows under airy bridges and down foaming leaps to other green levels of its own, was comrade of their joy, hailed by them in pagan fellowship.

Later a cloud blurred the first undimmed glamour of the day. At the same moment the driver pointed with his whip toward a tiny white village perched almost in the sky, off in the distance to westward, and a cloud seemed to pass over the mother's face also, for they both knew and remembered that there a living heart, once dear to both, was buried in a

self-chosen retirement. Buried but beating on. Another life wandering from the beaten path to hide itself from the consequence of its own innocent mistake.

"It is so sad, this Umbria!" she exclaimed inadvertently.

"Yes, but it is more fertile than any corner of Italy we have seen, and the peasants more thrifty," said Clare. "To me there is something exquisite in the despondence of these rain-threatened, sun-beaten, lonely, hill towns on their scattered brown peaks."

"They are happy enough, perhaps, but one is sad for their sake," continued Mrs. Reynolds. And both were silent thinking of that youthful, buried heart and hoping that the other had not remembered.

Clare dreaded her mother's pity, knowing that in the conscious act there was always pain sharpened and renewed. Her mother shrank from anything that recalled bitterness to her daughter. She neither spoke of the friend who had also made mistake and in caprice chosen this desolate spot for her retreat, dreading to inflict the pain of comparison. Finally Clare sighed, her face in its reflecting the sudden heaviness of the passing cloud. "Italy is a sort of intermediate state, a social

gatory after life, for many a soul, is it not? It is full of us for whom life is over while we are alive—who have not found life what we hoped——”

“Yet not the worst you feared,” interposed her mother hastily.

“No, it is far from being the inferno, if that is what you mean,” agreed Clare, “but it is not heaven either. I wonder if the other heaven is only a dream too.”

“They may evolve through expiation, according to the Catholic creed,” began Mrs. Reynolds.

“Even the sins of another?”

“There are always two who sin in every married sin, and two who make every mistake; never forget that, dear.” The mother was just as she was tender.

“Yes,” cried Clare, “and therein lies the fallacy of married arithmetic from the very start, mother! Figures don’t lie, however much they are lied about, even if they are Roman! One and one will continue to make two as they always have, no matter how many Bishops bless their union.”

Again the sun streamed full over the valley and gleamed upon a girl with a yellow kerchief on her head, standing knee deep in a bed of yellower mustard flower.

“Happy peasant!” cried Mrs. Reynolds. “Handsome and unillusioned!” They passed an old

woman, wrinkled and bent with a bundle of faggots on her shoulders, cautiously opening a rough wooden door from which her narrow path climbed almost perpendicularly.

“Happy peasant!” echoed Clare. “Exhausted, but not disappointed!”

Now the grey horse began to smell the rest that was legitimately his at the cathedral of Santa Maria, and with long strides they were whirled by countless pretty pictures on every side. A woman carrying a flat basket of yellow goslings, laughing in return for their cries of pleasure, till she showed all her white teeth; bouquets of brilliant-eyed children springing up like wild flowers along the roadside; a lusty ploughman tipping up his wicker flask of red Chianti in the shade. A landscape of human forms with a background such as the renaissance masters loved to harmonise in their sacred compositions.

Santa Maria itself was unrewarding enough. Yellow and ugly in the midst of its beggar-punctured square—every sort of human wreck presenting maimed limbs or smitten senses: magical alleviation of a few coppers.

“Must we go in?” asked Clare, shutting eyes upon a more than usually sickening form who thrust his deformity in her face to

recognition of his immediate claims on her charity. "Nature seems so infinitely more attractive than man or his handiwork this April morning!" But her mother was already on the steps pushing aside the leathern curtain, unmindful of such heresy.

With Clare in this mood, however, the interior was examined with shocking brevity. Instead of listening to the parables of the Saint, that have moved generations to gentle emotion, their ears were full of the voice of the green, glacial river running away to the sea. The spirit of St. Francis himself had entered into them, it would seem, since he too loved always to have his hut near the forest, where he might wander at will and alone. Even the rose garden, sacred to the legend of the Umbrian prophet and his passion, seemed to them to contract the largeness of the day. Their thought of St. Francis among the birds appealed to them more strongly than marble memorial or lighted shrine, painted ecstasy or pillared adoration.

In half an hour the disapproving priest, who had acted as guide, was rattling his keys behind them, and the white horse was headed across the fields to Assisi. A few short miles and the road began to mount; soon it became a climb and a stiff one. The white horse began to look like a fly clinging to a wall; Antonio, walking by his side, picking a

flower now and then, and telling the story of his life to the Signora in response to her random questions as she also tramped along, pausing, when the horse stopped to get his breath, to cry out over the beauty of the vision as they wound higher and higher between forbidding walls that withheld the valley save at irregular intervals, where a gateway or fallen stone gave entrance to the view.

At last the street became absolutely perpendicular, the white horse scampered like a goat, Antonio broke into a run to keep up, and Clare sat down to rest with a group of curious children swarming about her.

Luncheon over,—ordered in faith and forgotten in wine,—they strolled down the rough, stony street which still bears its proud name of Via dei Principi de Napoli, past the house of Metastasio, past the Pilgrim's chapel to the great monastery and cathedral in the foreground on the slope just below. The unbroken panorama of Umbria spread wide either hand, behind them the grass-grown street with its stone stairways leading to yet higher levels of houses; its melancholy, its unbroken silence. Before them the expanse of Italian lowland, in the spring atmosphere, and the façade of the cathedral with its wondrous rose window that no rival. Nature and art seemed to have con-

a consummation here, each heightening the effect of the other.

"I am going to sit here a while," Clare had announced, and an hour had almost slipped by before Mrs. Reynolds sent the guide to fetch her.

"Tell her I am not coming," was the continued reply, but at this point Mrs. Reynolds appeared in the door of the upper church and beckoned so peremptorily with her parasol that the figure on the wall rose and obeyed.

"Such a crypt and such tombs! such everything, in fact!" called her mother as soon as the distance permitted. "You must just get an idea of it, a cursory idea; you need not go into detail—never mind Baedeker, it is too dark to read, anyway."

Clare hurried down the incline and the outside stairway; they entered the lower church together. For a few awestricken minutes all proceeded conventionally, then she shivered.

"More Cimabue, more Giotto," she reflected. "What have I to do with them or they with me? Mother, darling, I am such a pagan! I felt blasphemous the first moment I met the chill of this place, and could not hide my bones from its touch. Let me go back to the dear April damp outside. I would rather stamp on my memory those wonderful flower-grown stairways, the tower against a fitful

sky, the doors, the outlines beloved of wind and weather."

"And miss the art entirely? The worship of the sanctuary expressed in it? The dedication of art to religion?"

"Yes, mother, all of it; let me go," pleaded Clare. "The outside is God's, the inside is man's. I will stay outside with God if you don't mind, and you need not hurry in the least. I am in good company."

So with a grave expression on her face the older woman turned back to her guide. He, poor fellow, put his finger significantly to his forehead as he watched the younger lady walk away, but his Signora was waiting for him and paid no attention to his gestures, so he fell upon his tombs with renewed impetus lest the other "Americana" become restless before the last relic should have been seen and duly rewarded.

For half an hour nothing happened to disturb the day in its passing over Umbria. Suddenly Clare remembered the cloisters she was mysteriously missing. And abruptly she walked downhill again, very much as she might have walked the post office in Summerfield, her step rather for so graceful a woman, her listless gone.

Cloisters were her favourite haunts wherever to be found. She knew just when the wind would vex the violet leaves in Florentine San Spirito, and at what season the heliotrope would scent the purple shadows of the inner cloister of San Marco. The spiral columns of St. John Lateran were associated in her memory with lofty palms, the gardens of Tre Fontana with the half bitter, half sweet odour of the eucalyptus, the chrysanthemums with Certosa, the roses with Vallombrosa.

Exotics of the heart, these children of the cloister yards that someone has called the "Widows of God." They had seemed to her as pensive lyrics, these Italian cloisters. At once so appealing and so repelling; like all our most exquisite passions.

She found this of Assisi heavy with mood. White clethra flowering in the branches of stern cypress trees, halfway up to the upper church windows—a hint of bridal loveliness amid the austerities of a forswearing community; appealing, touching, and full of human allurements in such celibate surroundings. Beneath its fantastic shadows an iron cross marking a "Brother's" grave; double galleries completely encircling the enclosure; no sound but the falling of light rain upon the stone flagging and through the cypress trees.

How like our hearts, thought Clare; some fall

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from heaven to break upon the stones, some find the white clethra's bosom and die in giving refreshment to beauty, content.

"It is beautiful, but so sad," she said to the young brother beside her, who had followed her without speaking.

"Too sad, Signora," he replied, and as he spoke a melancholy-voiced bell chimed from some belfry in the air above them as if in rebuke. Clare turned to go.

"This is all I have," she said regretfully, holding some small money out to him in grateful recognition of his subduing ciceronage.

"This is better," he replied softly, taking her hand respectfully and pressing it within his own as if life lay therein. She was startled, but pity for the imprisoned birds of the Italian cloisters rose in her heart as the tears to her eyes, to be swiftly followed by a burst of Protestant indignation. What she might have said, fired by her New England ancestry of Puritanism, was hindered by the proach of an older priest who had been standing unobserved within one of the arches, urging back to the lower church. At his motion the indiscreet young brother had vanished, and turned only the calm face of the Father with troubled eyes. He did not speak, but

witnessed the little scene and was waiting to exact due confession she had no doubt. Well, why disappoint him? She pitied the young ascetic; why not pronounce her creed to this reproving Father, who scorned all Nature and her workings within the sons and daughters of Eve?

She looked after the slight form so suddenly effaced by this superior will, and then as if speaking to herself said miserably, "Oh, it is all wrong and abominable! Let the broken-spirited and disillusioned and mortally-wounded creep into the shade of the cloister cypresses; it is their right,—as the sad creep into Italy to forget and be forgotten,—but spare the young blood! Spare the untried!"

The Priest looked at her sternly, but she went on pleading as if for herself, her own hope and conviction. "It is too hard, too lacking in wisdom or in love!"

"My daughter!" The interruption was solemn-voiced, but infinitely gentle.

"Forgive me; I am an outsider here," she continued, "but what could more surely develop vice, appetite, unholy desire, than a routine of perpetual thou-shalt-not? Why does not the Church establish an order of the affirmative? Thou shalt—everything? It would be more effective."

The gesture of the Priest for silence was now authoritative. She paused obediently and started toward the crypt, but he accompanied her, and in the candle light at the tomb of St. Agatha he scanned her face eagerly as if for recognition, saying: "I will answer your questioning, my daughter, if you will care to appoint a time and place more convenient. And I will not even ask in return if you have found the outer world all happiness."

She felt a strange weakness overcoming her. The darkness, the incense, the power of the man—outside the wind and rain would be her allies, here she was in an alien country, in his country. Her innate courtesy came first to her rescue. "I beg your pardon sincerely," she said. "I was as uncivil as I am ignorant of the Catholic Church and her reasoning. I am only a momentary disturber of the peace, however; forgive me, please," and she was gone.

He stood impassive, making no effort to detain her. "A ray of sunlight that struggled to the high altar by chance," say rather, he thought. There he strode back into one of the inner chapels and there before a crucified Christ; immovable, save at pious intervals his hands made the involuntary sign of the cross—lost in the mystic Nirvana who knows? meditating the deliverance of

and very mortal woman from the error of an uncatholic world.

Meantime Mrs. Reynolds, whose enthusiasm for art seldom deceived her as to the tea hour, had drawn her table to the edge of the balcony at the little *albergo Evasio*, which, being close by, had offered an inviting asylum from the weariness of afternoon sight-seeing. She had arranged the cups to the best advantage, concealing their thick lips by a bunch of wild flowers laid in their midst, covering a nick in the bread-plate by a couple of green fig leaves, and was now waiting for applause, in the form of her daughter, with growing impatience.

To pass the lagging interval she was chatting with the pretty Biancha who served her, to the limit of her Italian, while the blushing *contadina* curtsied in lieu of answering when the questions were beyond her.

“‘If it was cold here in winter?’ Ah, Signora, no! ‘If it was dull?’ Ah, Signora, a peasant must always work—then there were the Pardons truly; *festas* when one prayed and danced after. ‘If others were stopping at the *albergo*?’ Certainly,—but to-day only one or two. A Father newly arrived and ill, God restore him! and also two English Signoras.”

“‘What kind of tea?’ Oh, surely tea,—but what

kind,—no, she could not say. Would the Signora not prefer wine? Chianti was ever to be had fresh and certainly more delightful than tea! ‘Was the *albergo* sanitary?’ What was ‘sanitary?’ Certainly it must be a holy place so near to the church and under the protection of all the Saints—but certainly the Signora must speak with the Padrona. She could better say all in truth,—*si, si*,—she would call her,” so Biancha, all roses and smiles and gesticulations, ran for the Padrona, and Clare found a family party on the terrace of the *Evasio* on her arrival at the inn. In their midst her mother, learning the interests and vicissitudes of the entire neighbourhood with her usual vital sympathy and giving advice as to domestic economy, child-raising, and village improvement in rapid succession.

“Only think, dear,” she cried, “Biancha is betrothed of that handsome boy we noticed come up the hill astride a donkey. His name is Philip though he is always called Beppo. They will be married next Lady’s Day if his old mother will enough, but she is too ill now to hear the boy called, and so they wait like dutiful children. The inn is charming. Such views! The best and most comfortable too. Madame the proprietress never stops at the inn where we had our dinner. It is all a trick of the *concierge* at Perugia

he is so jealous of Madame. Since her husband's death, a year ago on St. John's Day, she has carried on her business alone. Isn't it hateful of the *concierge*? But I have promised her that we will send all our friends here and now she has some English ladies and a priest, a Jesuit who came this morning to rest. Drink your tea, dear,—it is not English breakfast tea, but I have explained to Madame how much better that is and I am going to send her some to try for her guests."

The fickle sunshine that had illumined the landscape while she was speaking disappeared. Clare drank her tea clear, her face full on the view of the valley over which a storm seemed brooding from the southward. The wind fell away and the slender olive leaves did not tremble. The air was sweet with oleander; too sweet with the sultry heaviness pressed out by sultry clouds that drooped to rest upon the hillsides, where the light still hovered.

The storms that sweep Umbria are its most striking feature, to those who love nature. Rome has her Saint Peter's, Greece her Acropolis, but admit to these fortress towns of Umbria their tempests!

Those whirling, enveloping tempests that rock the very hillsides in their fury and go reeling on over the drenched plains, blind in their madness to storm yet another village and drown yet another

valley. Crushing the sweetness from the flowers, huddling the sheep in soft helpless masses beneath any convenient shelter, spoiling the finery of market days, descending on the bare heads of pious pilgrims that troop from shrine to shrine on holy days. Lashing the wide-bedded Tescio in its turning, curving, swerving course, inciting it to rise and riot with wind and rain.

Such a storm had risen from the deceptive sunshine and hurried from hillside to hillside like the silver progress of a victorious host—armour and horsemen a gleaming wake in its flying train. When nightfall brought no abatement, perplexity overtook the wanderers. In halting Italian they questioned and exclaimed. The Padrona shrugged a long expressive shrug and cast her eyes down at the flooded plain. Biancha frowned desperately and looked up at the sky.

“It seems a place to linger in,” cried Clare, fascinated by the eventfulness of mere weather. “Let us stay over night!” Then more stumbling Italian,—overhearing which, the priest, who had also taken a forced refuge from the storm and stood watching the majesty of the invading rain, came unobtrusively to their assistance.

“The road would seem long in the darkness; it was damp early in the valleys,” he said kindly.

“Madame would find the inn perfectly possible; bare, it was true, of all luxury, but clean, and the fare entirely adequate. He would take it upon himself to explain to their driver, if it would be a service to them—not an intrusion——” And in response to their appreciative acquiescence he called the Padrona of the *Evasio* back to them and gave her all necessary orders, then asking if he could be of no farther service to them, he left them to find Tonio, who was, be it said, as wet inside as the afternoon was out—and not with rain!

Now came a triumph of smiles and much running to and fro to the music of sharp Italian commands, the shrill “*subito! subito!*” the deferential “*comanda Signora,*”—as they were being settled in their cell-like rooms above. The whole vicinity seemed to quiver with excitement, and the storm outside that beat upon the roof to sink away before the whirlwind of activity aroused beneath the eaves of the little *albergo Evasio*.

CHAPTER III

FATHER BENARDINO

THE Evasio, as everybody knows, enjoys a privileged position for an inn; situated on the lower piazza which follows the line of arcades of the famous cloister, separated by them only from the great garden of the monastery below. Seen from the plain it seems actually to form a part of the ecclesiastical stronghold which presents its imposing mass like a fortress built firm upon a rock.

Alas for the Franciscans! It belongs now to the state, declared a national monument after the union of Italy, and schoolboys romp in the inner courtyard, while the black-robed frairs in charge of the Basilica inhabit but a small portion of the convent. Although it is legally the property of the Holy See, the poor Franciscans have never been able to build a schoolhouse for the boys elsewhere and rid the sacred precincts of intruders, and the Pope has never availed himself of the permission granted him to do so in their stead.

From a distance the empty colonnades resemble nothing so much as a vast beehive deserted of its

swarm; but tradition survives, and from the arches of rough stone which have been indescribably chastened to hues of wind and sunshine by the passing weathers, the heart of all Umbria beats beneath your glance.

Perugia, maintained to be under the sign of the Virgin and the Lion, on her rocky peak to the right; threatening as she broods. Before you, on a spur dividing the valley of Spoleto from the nearer valley of the Tiber, are Bettoua and Montfalco, hanging like an oriole's nest lashed to the high branches of some forest tree. Farther south, Spoleto, Trevi and Nami are visible in clear seasons, and nearer again is Fogliano, with other domes and villages clustering about it on the plain. Oak forests, corn fields, terraced gardens, olive groves, orange orchards and the straight endless lines of the vineyards, each in its season contribute their share to the colour and life of the panorama outspread beneath the radiant Italian sky that melts from turquoise to sapphire, from lapis lazuli to azure.

Several days passed, and yet the charm of this semi-monastic habitation did not pall upon either mother or daughter. Sometimes they sat a whole morning long under the grape-trellised shade of the balcony which overhung the valley as airily as any

swallow's nest, reading, writing, or drinking in the sheer beauty of the green foreground and mystic distance.

They became asborbed in the traffic of the steep winding road, too, recognising at a glance many of the scrambling donkeys and short-legged horses that galloped up into the town with cheerful frequency. After the early luncheon they made an excursion higher up the hillside toward the ancient castle crowning the summit or drove down into the valley to refresh themselves in the spring life and animal joyousness of the open furrow and starting blade. They had not spoken with the priest since his kindly intervention the afternoon of the shower, though he came and went on his own sacred affairs, presumably too preoccupied for more than a courteous salute in passing or the formal "*Bon appetito*" before dinner when he chanced to dine.

"Frosty but kindly," Mrs. Reynolds had quoted under her breath one afternoon as he passed through the yard of the *albergo*, up the slanting piazza toward the church and was lost to view.

"What is he doing here, do you suppose?" she asked; "I wonder if it would be a sacerdotal scandal to ask him?"

"I should not think a New England Congregationalist would care if it was," replied Clare. "B"

if he were to ask us the same question, what would you say?"

"Rest, historic interest, clean inn,—oh, any number of things." Mrs. Réynolds looked quite equal to the defence.

"Well, why don't you ask him?" urged Clare.

"I have always wanted to know a real priest at first hand," continued her mother. "I would prefer him to be a Jesuit and brim full of culture—then I would be willing to stay in this capricious fastness of yours all summer. An agreeable man does stimulate, and an unrelieved atmosphere of women is liable to degenerate!"

"We need not stay until to-morrow if it bores you," suggested Clare, sitting up and tossing aside her books. "I will send for Tonio to carry us over to Perugia and pack all your things myself. We can spend to-night in Perugia at the Brufani, be in Florence to-morrow afternoon—then Switzerland, France——" She broke off as if checked by some painful thought.

"What? After all the trouble we had in getting our luggage over here?" Her mother did not permit her to finish. "Now that I have unpacked, do you condemn me to replacing all those bothersome little gold-topped bottles, decorating the windows with drying sponges, and sorting the rubbish in the

bottom of my trunks? Must I unpin my photographs and pack them in tissue paper? Fee everybody and say good-bye for the thousandth time. Clare, can a daughter of mine really want to make me such labour? You don't want to go really? Not really?"

Clare laughed reassuringly.

"We can't go until next week, for the laundry has gone to Beppo's aunt and she in her turn has gone to the square of Santa Maria on the plain to sell her carrots."

"Heaven be praised for carrots!" groaned Mrs. Reynolds.

"At least until to-morrow!" Clare reminded her and set off on her customary afternoon saunter up the hill past Santa Clara, her white gown and slight figure likening her to a drifting cloud.

Mrs. Reynolds watched her with a deepening softness overspreading her face.

"Dear child!" she sighed involuntarily, "I was never intended for a nun of nature's sisterhood!"

Then turning back to the inn, she summoned Biancha to carry the basket of dainties she promised to take Beppo's poor old mother, and got herself in the enthusiasm of the little peasant girl's delight.

How Father Benardino transferred his corporal body from the cathedral below to the castle above remains a latter-day miracle. Certainly it was he who came straight down from the sky an hour later to the spot where Clare was resting and gazing with unutterable eyes off at mere Umbria—happiness perhaps. He had grown accustomed already to her listless outline against any sort of background. She seemed too much in harmony with nature to even disturb his visual perception; but to-day there was a sadness, a positive pain about her that set him thinking. "Poor child!" Her mother's words came to him also as he watched her. Human sin and misery seemed removed from her; she moved apart, a spirit detached and remote. This appealed to him strongly, since to him the supernatural became more than the purely human every added day of his life. He would have said she was created for joy, judging her as a mortal. He could not judge her as a woman, for of such, as a priest, he knew nothing. His ignorance, one would have felt assured, was voluntary and complete. Yet as a priest his personality was of such stuff as his surrendered past, and her soul's good was a possibility to every lover of souls,—to every vicar of Christ upon the earth.

So he did not pass on after his habitual salutation, but asked gently:

"You find nature less harsh than the cloister? Less sad?"

She raised her eyes thoughtfully.

"Perhaps not less sad, but more voluntary," she said.

His glance quickened.

"Do you believe punishment more easy to bear than renunciation?"

"If we do not dare to try life we are cowards," she said simply. "Certainly it is braver to try, and then to support our failure nobly with added respect for those who do not fail; for those who actually prevail. Nature is impartial, she has no reservations, she trusts us with all her potentialities. It is the dignity of a free life and free will that impresses me in contrast to the enforced duty befitting a slave."

Father Benardino gave her another of his searching glances.

"Pardon me, but are you not an American?" he asked.

Clare smiled.

"Was it my battle cry of freedom that hit me?"

"No, it was the conviction with which you saw the evidence of thought on serious subjects rarely found in countries that blindly acc-

fully deny the truth. You are not happy," he added, in the tone the confessional knew so well. "Why? Or if that is asking too much of your confidence since you are not of my own fold, tell me why you remain here in the solitude, why you do not go away——"

"The same wonder we have been wondering about your own stay!" cried Clare.

"I am not a free agent, you know; the church bids me labour and I obey. Now she bids me rest for a season. Under her will, I recuperate from the exhaustive service of a tropical climate, that I may be prepared to rise and serve again at sound of her call. But you have only to choose and go, like a bird whose path is the sky—yet you remain in sadness, uncomforted."

His face was full of feeling no less vital for its perfect self-control.

"I am something of a pagan," Clare began as she paused. "I was worshipping at one of my shrines when you joined me. I love nature as you love God, perhaps——"

"But the look of sorrow, the suffering?"

"Perhaps I believe in expiation, if not in renunciation," she suggested. "I may even have sinned."

He shook his head as if unconvinced.

"Does nature heal, my child?"

The answer was so long in coming he thought he had sounded her and the incident was at an end, but she replied at last in a clear, low voice:

“No, she hurts horribly.”

“I know, I know, and the church heals. That is the difference between us and our faith.”

A silence fell upon them, but not between them. The priest was studying the sunny landscape that had so enthralled her and she profited by his absorption to study his face. She found there nothing of the greasy voluptuary which had repelled her at every turn among the monks and friars of Rome. Nothing of the abnormal or pronouncedly ascetic. Nothing of the animal leashed by a vow or the carnivorous reduced by fasting. Nothing of the popular misconception familiarly associated with the Italian priesthood in ignorant romance.

The eyes were brown and warm. The shaven face needed no trickery of military coiffuring to prove its curves or set off its profile. The mouth was intellectual. The set of the head valiant. When he walked, his gait was unlike the usual shuffle of the petticoated brotherhoods as were his firm, capable hands, never folded in Pharisaical perfection across his breast, but swinging like those of an ordinary Samaritan who would be first to help a fallen brute or a fellow man in distress.

“A soldier of the cross!” flashed into Clare’s mind, and for it she trusted him. As for him, he had no need to scan her features now. There might be other opportunities. If not, at least he had the impressions of the days past to guide his intuitions. He was already aware that she was not a beauty by the standard of the Parisian world of beautiful women,—a strange conclusion for a priest had he not been a Jesuit and trained in the wickedest of capitals. He also knew that the first flush of youth was no longer hers, although she was so fair and frail of form; that her hair was cloudy and like unto halos; that her spirit at unexpected provocation leaped in her eyes; that her head was proud as her voice was sweet; that her fragile whiteness symbolised neither physical weakness nor lack of valour. He had seen her colourless often. Once he had seen her glorious—Mona Lisa and the Blessed Damozel reincarnated. All this while seeing nothing,—as he passed to and fro on his self-imposed duties of prayer and exhortation. For Father Benardino was a Jesuit; and what a Jesuit is,—a Jesuit knows.

It seemed to follow naturally enough that he should linger to tell her pretty legends of St. Francis, who loved to haunt these same hillsides, and then of the Umbrian peasantry and their cus-

toms immemorial. He was especially at ease when their interest took them toward the art of the world, speaking of his favourite Madonnas—recalling one at Madrid and another in the Hermitage at St. Petersburg. He contrasted the sacred office of art in the churches of the West and East, touched upon the conversion of art after renaissance in Italy; in short, talked as any agreeable traveller might, without a returning hint of personality.

They went homeward toward twilight as far as the obscure chapel on the edge of the town where he had an office to say for a sick Father. There they parted, but her brain set in motion by his conversation retained its stimulant. Objective interests long dormant revived.

Mrs. Reynolds had dressed for dinner and was in her best mood. She was as entertaining as her afternoon had been spent on the Champs Elysees or with congenial spirits at home. She “chattered smartly about her neighbours,”—which the mortal Stevenson pronounced to be a superior commendation for any woman,—tossing off tidbits culled from her voluminous mail and adorned all in the same rich spirit of a philosophy could ever worst.

The letters required dextrous skipping for the reason they were read aloud or

snatches. No allusion to Clare's marriage, no inquisitive garrulity was ever permitted to wound her. Mrs. Reynolds took the bitterness herself, with never a hint of martyrdom and never a sign of sainthood, counting herself blest to be permitted to shield her dearer self.

So to-night she had quoted gaily scraps about the opera in Vienna, the influx of Americans at Dresden, how full sleeves were growing at Paris, how a friend had received a coveted appointment to a desirable Embassy, of the new books offered in the lists of the publishers, an astronomical discovery in Mars, and a new baby just arrived in the family of some cousins in England. "With blue eyes, Clare! *Quel scandal!* In spite of all the family traditions!"

"Did you hear from Calamity?" queried Clare. She had dubbed the old gardener Calamity, from his raven habit of writing only bad news and only writing when such was available. "Read me his letter, do!" So Mrs. Reynolds sorted it out from among the crested notepaper and letter-heads of foreign hotels in the pile before her and laid the commercial note-sheet with its blue lines on top, its envelope half covered with a staggering row of pink two-cent stamps,—a mute presence from far-away Summerfield,

“ ‘ DEAR MRS. REYNOLDS. *Friend*:

“ I love the way he puts you in your place o start,” interpolated Clare. Her mother rea with becoming emphasis:

“ ‘ I write obedient to agreement to let you l that nothing has happened here.

“ ‘ Mrs. Whittelsey’s roses winter killed, but : were not much damaged. The horses look g the dog is well but kind of lonesome. John M was elected Selectman for the Center at the M meeting. Some say the taxes will go up; gu will be cheaper to die if they do. There ha several deaths, mostly aged couples. Mrs. mer has had a shock and can’t live. Her son pected from New York State to the funera minister don’t grow in popularity though t vals are well attended. The bills enclosed : right, I guess. They are mostly eave-sp mending roofs. With respects, I will c close. Yours truly, “ ‘ SETH B

“ ‘ P. S.—I think there’s ants left in th as the seeds don’t come up around th as good as formerly.”

The second postscript she did not read

“—P. S. 2.—Folks wonder when yo home.”

"Let us drink to Calamity!" proposed Clare, as her mother finished and their glasses clinked crisply, while the two Englishwomen ate in glum reserve at the empty table d'hôte, speaking only occasionally to rate the Chianti for being too dear or to remark how tiresome they had found the unseasonable heat of the afternoon.

Mrs. Reynolds's whole heart responded to the gallantry of her daughter's offer to be gay, and they laughed as no one had heard them for many a long week when the retiring Britishers commented audibly on their countrywomen's lack of manners in public places.

"Very tiresome these Americans, aren't they?" said the Honourable Margaret. To which the Honourable Mary responded heartily, adding, "So loud in a common dining-room too!" And they stumped down to worry Beppo about a shawl they had left in one of their sketching excursions.

Something had warmed Clare. What it was, no matter. The mother was so grateful for any incident that might have served to set these listless feet on the bridge that leads over the cruel gulfs of young despair, that her own mood was a rainbow spanning her way to the abode of the invisible Gods! The diplomacy of the heart is not to be acquired at any court. Mrs. Reynolds had become a

finished diplomat through love of Clare and desire to guard her. Silent in silence; giving tenderness for tenderness; always luring her from herself toward forgetfulness. Living in the hope of restoring life to this shattered child of hers.

When they were strolling up and down the balcony after dinner she was not surprised to hear of the afternoon encounter with the priest. Clare was not evasive or unsatisfactory. She told her all that she had gleaned of Father Benardino, as well as her own strong impression of him, exchanging the little incident for whatever it was worth of momentary diversion in the monotony of their seclusion.

When they parted for the night Mrs. Reynolds asked carelessly:

“Are we really off to-morrow?”

“Not to-morrow; not until next week perhaps if you so dread the effort of another move,”
Clare.

They kissed, not perfunctorily, but fondly, left alone, Mrs. Reynolds nodded to herself. She was not a Jesuit; no, she was that one thing astute—a mother.

The moon rose and Clare was still at her window. The Summerfield letters always turned her thoughts. Always aroused the mental conflict of her

position. Again she reminded herself that she had brought it all upon herself; but in spite of the reiteration of our friends, there is not sufficient consolation in remembering oneself to be the cause of one's suffering,—and to-night the torn letter from the old gardener at home had fluttered through her mother's fingers, one fragment only escaping destruction,—to lie staring up at her from the floor:

“P. S. 2. Folks wonder when you are coming home.”

Well, she wondered herself. At this and many other puzzles. In Europe there was, for example, the persistently evil chance of a meeting with Count Variani. No less liable because unsought and undesired. Would it remain unsought on his side? Granted his nature, would he not lean toward her unavailable, as he had never craved her at hand? A man to be victimised by his own impulses, disregarding the legitimate, could she trust him to keep his compact and leave her in peace less fatally than she had once trusted to his fidelity?

Faithless in fidelity would he proved faithful to infidelity? There was much to cause apprehension in the thought. Yet to go home, to face the hollow sympathy of her oid acquaintance, to be pitied, to be an acknowledged failure, for that was what a

divorced woman was: an acknowledged failure in the one great career of a normal woman. Guilty or guiltless the world holds no place for her. The unmarried, married woman like herself. At the age when her friends were amusing themselves before taking the cares of life upon them or efflorescing in the joy of their own young households, she alone would be compelled to stand one side. Criticised for every forgetful half hour, wounded by innumerable blows all unintentionally given. Orlando understood it when he cried:

“A bitter thing to look at happiness through
others' eyes!”

No, to return was impossible. Better hide for a while at least from all the curious, envious, self-complacent forms of pity, until life shaped to a certain course.

“Poor mother!” she sighed; “poor dear mother.”

But even for her mother's sake there would be cruelty in a hasty return.

“Give us time!” implored her heart and prayed together. Yes, she would give them time and rest too in this beneficent refuge of St. Francis and his miracles.

The foolish old dotard moon saw another

another window in Assisi that night. The priest was reading with rapt attention, though not for the first time,—a letter from the heart of the heart of Catholic Rome. Reading so intently that he did not heed the pale yellow glory spreading about him on every side. He had turned the third page before the moon spied him and gilded the words as the decoration of some sacred missal:

“She is both young and rich. An American and living apart from her Catholic husband whose house is of our own. Her soul is without consolation. The Mother Church has such to offer. Go to any reposeful spot where the sublime inspiration of the martyrs may lead you in concluding your treatise, and remember always that the blessing and exhortation of the order is upon you.”

It would seem that chance had been inspired when she drew his feet to Assisi—except that in the world of the Jesuit, chance does not exist.

CHAPTER IV

HOLY WEEK AT ASSISI

ALTHOUGH Easter came late this year, neither had realised that it was at hand. They had wandered beyond the sphere of their own church calendar and every other, out into the spaces of mere unmeasured time where dates and their common values cease to exist.

It was Palm Sunday, and a holy excitement began to make itself felt in the air. The peasants, chattering down from mass, each bore their spray of greenery, blest and distributed to the anthem "Pueri Hebræorum,"—their ears resounding with the acclaim of the hymn that followed with its repetitions of "Gloria Laus et Honor!"

By some the trophy was held aloft, by others tucked coyly in the bodice, or in the hat-band of a sturdy Tito or Giovanni, as if it were but a bit of worldly decoration. A piece of bravado to disconnect it, perhaps, from the awesome rites of the church and religion that made a hearty fellow think somehow of death and the judgment even on a

gay morning, with Lizetta and Maria nudging each other in front of him and Lucia chuckling and whispering with the rest behind.

Biancha, whose eyes were round and solemn enough in the church, came laughing, blushing, gossiping down the lower piazza and offered her branch to Clare, who was hanging over the balcony rail in her favourite occupation—watching the life of the Seraphic City go by.

So it was Passion week again. Her thoughts became overcast with sad and dear recollections. Passion week, Easter, returning spring! Yet within her life no power to meet the miracle with answering emotion. No inward crisis to match the divine emergency of renewal!

Already the little fires wound their tulle of smoke among the olive trees; playful little fires wreathing the haggard hillsides with their haze, while their flames leaped and licked about the gnarled trunks of the ancient trees, preparing the terraces beneath their grey branches for lyric green that would spring up in a night and cover all the hillsides with a blur of emerald confusion.

Crocus and daffodil would follow. Dog-roses would scent the hedgerows soon; the cyclamen would dream of dawn in her scentless virginity of the woods above Assisi, and the honeysuckle would

draped the myrtle trees in the villa gardens round about.

Passion week—ah, what comfort could the church bestow upon an outsider? If any she was broad enough to receive, even from founts so unlike that of her baptism in orthodox Summerfield.

On Wednesday, the Tenebræ would be sung, and she pondered over it and its significance as the intervening hours passed away—softly, if sadly, as is their wont o'er Umbria. Mrs. Reynolds seemed living as fully in the silences of this Italian hillside as among her accustomed haunts of men. Always busy, always sympathetic, a self-contained, self-sustained individuality,—arguing well for its personal immortality. The poor already blessed her here, and one of her sorest griefs had been Clare's indifference to this outlet for effort which the ill or wretched so naturally afforded her.

“What is hunger or physical pain to endure?” Clare asked disdainfully. “Or any mere temporary ailment of the body?” To which her mother mentally opposed the unreasonableness of youth and noted philanthropy as a medicine to be applied later to this sick spirit—going on her way of ministration alone. Father Bernardino chatted with them from time to time when he came to take his hasty repasts at the inn, but he often absent

himself entirely. He rarely allowed himself to linger and chat of more than the weather, but once talking, the inspiration of companionship often made him forget his haste and drop into a rich and remunerative expansion.

He had been too ill at Rome to complete his work on the martyrs, it appeared, and had been sent to Assisi to add the finishing chapters; incidentally it was his privilege to assist his brother priests in various matters of the church. "Not a retreat, not a holiday," he explained frankly, "something of that which you understand by both and neither."

When Clare questioned him concerning the coming fasts and festivals he spoke eloquently, but did not urge nor, moreover, invite her to be witness or worshipper. She slipped into the dark church alone when the day came, quite without intention. The sad words were being sung without the sustaining hope of the organ! mere human effort, alone in its hour of shadow and fear. On the right, or epistle, side of the altar the triangular candlesticks in which fifteen tapers were fixed shed the only brightness visible in the vast interior. Fourteen of these symbolise the Apostles and the two Marys, and after each of the fourteen psalms were sung they were extinguished, one by one, until only the

Highest, the Light of the World, remained in the April gloom.

The lamentations and reproaches finished, the Miserere cried up into the dusk. One voice speaking the desolation, imploring the mercy of the divine pity. It was overwhelming. A tangible reality. She suffered, and made her escape to the dear familiar world outside, yet was powerless to rid herself of the impression of the hour.

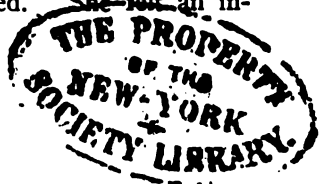
The following afternoon found her again a pagan shepherdess far up on the hillside hunting the early cyclamen, beyond all sight or sound of these disturbing celebrations, these haunting recitals of the crucifixion, this insistence of pain. Everywhere in the town it was perceptible.

Father Benardino was fasting and came no more to offer his Italian compliments, so mother and daughter were thrown on their own resources, but the subject of the Tenebræ was not broached between them. On Good Friday, Clare was restless, proposing plans and discarding them until Mrs. Reynolds feared the wander-spirit had broken out again, and sighed over her remembrance of the last year's gipsying. Would it ever end? How would it end? Should she ever hear the jays in the top of her own Norway pines again? the west wind ' her trees? or the home flowers swing their lit

chalices of incense to the dawn? Heaven seemed just a little more than three thousand leagues of rolling ocean away, that Good Friday afternoon. She could not walk; she would be self-indulgent for once, and read or rest.

Left to her own devices Clare suddenly knew what she must have intended to do from the first. It was Good Friday, of course. In a Catholic community like this, the continued sorrows of the Saviour borne hour by hour were felt by nerves and heart alike. It was contagious. Father Benardino and all the other priests looked deathly worn with vigils. She had noticed the white face of the novizio, Paolo, during the Miserere, and its expression hurt her still—more than pain. They would all be there in the church together; wholly one in the mysterious communion of suffering. The inn was deserted. Time seemed to have stopped.

She drifted toward the Basilica more than ever as a wandering cloud blown by some unaccountable wind, and pushed aside the heavy curtain. She was late, for only four candles remained lighted. Again she heard the solemn voices, the melancholy words of tragic import; saw the candles one by one flicker and fail to blackness as the disciples to the last "all forsook Him and fled." She felt an in-



describable thrill of the shrill inevitable in the unearthly accents, warning of the end. Then after a breathless rendering of "Now is the hour at hand,—the Son of Man goeth forth to be betrayed,"—a last cry of anguish for the world's folly, a silence fell, the death prelude. The Light of the World was no more; the last candle failed, darkness covered the earth. A sense of being left on a strange shore of mortality, disowned and alone, swept over the shuddering worshippers.

To Clare it was as if death was the only desirable. To go out with the light, searching the infinity of night for that last archangel cry, heard of the naked soul, not the sense. A stifled movement became perceptible as the crowd arose from its knees and began to leave the church, crossing from side to side to avoid the immovable nuns and prostrate penitents entranced beyond awakening from their swoon of the Passion. She saw without seeing, the crowded altars, the wrapt confessionals—all the oblivious brotherhood of universal and personal penitence.

A hand touched her shoulder, and she looked up into the face of Father Benardino bending over her. He was smiling at her, a smile infinitely removed, the smile associated with the victorious dead.

"I knew you would come, my child," he said; "you could not keep away."

"I never dreamed it was so wonderful," she half whispered, but her lips quivered, and he went from her, shutting the door of a remote confessional between them, before which waited many a craving soul.

He would help them; ah, if he could help her! Give her back the lost dignity and ideal of her life. Her temperament and education fought against the suggestion, but she did not move until the fainting of a young novizio by her side startled her to her feet, for it was Paolo. She saw his face in the deepening dusk, and recognised him by its look of pain.

Biancha bringing in the coffee next morning found her signora "*multa bella*," white and weary as his Reverence. All night her dreams had repeated the face of the young devotee: sometimes, as she had seen it swooning at her feet on the cold pavement of the lower church, and again looking at her from the great crucifix where it had replaced the downcast eyes of the lost "Light of the World!" Waking to repel the sad vision, she slept again, to dream of Count Variani wearing the garb of a Franciscan brother and urging her to return to him despite the fact that his vows prevented a

kiss of reconciliation. Sleep can be horrible even to the young. The morning brings a sure release but not its legitimate joy. The phantoms hover as the mists creep lower and lower from the mountains; it is not the clear glory of dawn. Clare had often found herself hoping that the final sleep promised "His beloved" should be dreamless sleep, as she drew herself from the unregulated spirit of dreams.

Remembrance of the scenes of Good Friday banished the nearer shadow of her dreams to-day, as the morning spread its accustomed diligence over the neighbourhood of the Evasio. The voices of the workers in the vineyards below rose up to her reassuringly. Biancha's bright petticoats flashed and out among the lettuce beds of the kitchen garden, where already the green peas were blossom.

It was the same familiar world as before. Nothing externally changed except that the sun had veiled its face in sympathy with the church, and only as it drew down on the horizon lay a sharp blue streak increased the greenness and made the world waiting in a half light for rain or sun or any dramatic possibility of weather.

Instinctively Clare turned to her mother. In her, sanity was always to be found; the

sense of security. Mrs. Reynolds was alert to observe her daughter's drooping spirit. She had already decided the atmosphere of the place too introspective, almost cloistral. Her brain had worked and her wires flashed while Clare had sat stupefied in the crypt engulfed in mysticism.

They read together as usual most of the morning. The oranges were heavy on trees, mingling their rich, fruity odours with the poetry of Tasso and the life of St. Francis indiscriminately. It was chilly on the balcony without the sun, and they gave it up after an hour or more and started for a ramble through the old streets where the grass grows between the stones beneath, and above in the shrines the Madonnas in their faded paint mutely accept the homage of the casual worshipper. Only in the vicinity of the cathedral was there any sign of life. Mrs. Reynolds, intent on Cimabue, entered the lower church and stepped back with a startled exclamation, for the great crucifix lay prostrate on the stairs of a near altar, the dimness of the crypt adding to the reality of its semblance to a lifeless form. At a respectful distance the faithful, both pilgrims and penitents, knelt in awe, slipping their rosary noiselessly through their fingers, their lips moving without a whisper to jar the heavy silence of death.

"What is it? What has happened?" she asked a peasant child as she stepped back through the door, and the little girl answered simply: "Our Lord died yesterday, Signora."

Clare was whiter than ever as they turned away. She felt as a heathen might who had never before heard the story of the Resurrection, much less professed to believe it as a member of a strict orthodox, first parish church of Summerfield. How Summerfield would hold up its hands at such idolatry! Yet probably if Christ died for all, He died for Summerfield as well as for Assisi, only it seems to have been so much more natural to have died for Assisi. She could not have told why. She tried to imagine the deacons of her own church kneeling in the shadow of the cross, submerged in regret for their own hardness toward a neighbour, a wrongdoing, or longing for forgiveness of their own secret sins. How oddly the ladies of the Summerfield sewing society would feel in any posture of worship save in the corner of their ancestral family pew! Godfearing they truly were, but Christ-adoring, after the manner of these centuries with their centuries of the church in blood to make the saints seem real and the angels a helpful certainty.

Out of the darkness there had come an

tion to Mrs. Reynolds that fixed her determination more firmly than before to break the hypnotic spell exerted by this Catholic stronghold and bear her daughter back to the world of human effort. That Catholicism could ensnare a heart disillusioned might have been easy to foresee had not that heart beat in the breast of a New England Puritan. What if Clare, with her well-trained brain, were to let herself go free from conventional restraints to an emotional excitement? And that too under the impulse of an objective religion better adapted to the gaping peasants than a soul taught to worship God in spirit at all times and places, disregarding of feast, fast, or tabernacle!

Well might it be the mother's turn to face the night with a startled consciousness of thoroughly aroused apprehension. Easter morning broke over the Seraphic City in glory. It climbed the eastern hills, opened the drowsy flowers, led the birds of St. Francis in their warbling matins of ecstasy. The cathedral shone as with the reflection of the light invisible. The faded wayside shrines smiled 'neath their crowns of rustic garlands. The road sparkled with animation as the Easter crowds wound around the hill up to the town to mass.

Spring and youth are immortal affinities. Clare was young, and spring was at her casement. She

dressed for the *festa* with unwonted care, even adding a bunch of the pale dawn-hued cyclamen to her white gown and joined her mother as fresh as the morning, happy in the Easter awakening. All the world seemed transformed over night. The bells of cart horses and donkeys mingled gaily in the stableyard of the inn. Biancha was running to and fro with red and white flagons of wine purchased with an eye to the noonday frolic after mass. Horses neighed and the click of coppers on the marble slab that served as a bar rang to the tune of merry change.

Mrs. Reynolds would have preferred to have attended a Protestant church on Easter Sunday, but where to find one? The English women suggested reading the service at home, with morning prayer read by one while the others made the responses. That settled it, even if Father Bernardino had remarked the week before that the Easter service would interest them—the only churchward suggestion he had ever allowed himself to propose. Her own voice was one of rare power, they had said, and that of Paolo brought listeners from as far as Perugia on festivals, according to the assignment of the Evasio. Music could lead her to Reynolds where all other pipers failed, and she was as eager as Clare when, after the droning of

tences, the great organ poured over them unrestrained.

Out flew the sense upon the soaring "Alleluias!" Beyond all written scale following those high fresh voices that are forever at home among the golden revelation of sunset or the breaking flush of dawn. Life escapes all confines in pursuit of the iridescent variation,—*"Alleluia!"* Forever and ever toward the Light of the World their flight takes wing. *"Alleluia!"* Vestments, candles, incense, all contributing indiscriminately to those chromatic thirds that, beckoned ever by the organ, seem still rising to call them higher. More intense grows the entreaty; the voices lift till they are almost lost in the dome and are only caught in the antiphonal rising up from below—*"Alleluia!"* whispered up in a piercing tremolo to blend with the echo sinking down from above. What vasts of sound were thundered over them as the final organ and choral united to burst across the flood-tide marks of human joy and triumph and swept the human heart on and up beyond all realms of recognition!

What little heady ecstasies the organ dared during the incense burning, and how it trembled at last, as love spent itself in the supreme *"Alleluia and Alleluia!"* till the outermost space of remotest heaven must have been convinced that He had risen!

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When it was over, they clung to each other as strangers from another planet in need of some human landmark. The earth swung under them. The girl was radiant, the mother hushed and bewildered.

“There is nothing but music after all!” cried Clare. “It has no sex, no time, no space, no to-day and no to-morrow! It is enough to have created a world for, enough to live and die for!”

She broke into the strain of the mighty *Stabat Mater*, singing with the bravura of a soldier on the march. Again illumination came to the observant mother. Music should save her, then; music was the clue she had been seeking, hitherto in vain. And again the birds sounded like her own faithful robins in the apple trees of Summerfield orchards, and again the wind seemed to blow sweet and true from her own lofty trees leagues of seas away.

Blessed be Easter! her hope cried within her, and no one warned her by revealing that at that very instant Father Bernardino was praying, as he never prayed before, for the soul of a woman; soul he begged from God for the church as a gift of favour to an unworthy supplicant. Pray long, long after the bells of the inn had rung on the hillside that the Forestieri were about to

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the Albergo Evasio above ; to dine on young chicken too, fresh salade and a whip made by the Signora in the American style and flavoured with fresh oranges grown in the steep garden with the shadow of the Basilica.



CHAPTER V

THE AMERICAN FLAG

GERTIE is coming to us," said Mrs. Reynolds, laying down her letter and looking at Clare. Already the post office at Assisi said that in ten days the Signora Americana received more letters than the inn itself, than the monastery, than the wine factory below, or the convent of Santa Chiara above.

"She is really coming—you will enjoy it?" she asked less positively, and with a shade of anxiety in her voice.

"No," said Clare, colouring a little and glancing in the direction of the priest, who was reading within sound of their voices, as she smiled. "She will tell me what is not being worn in Paris!" She let her glance wander over her simple white frock with a shrug of comparison, adding: "She suggests that the modes of last year are not now considered strictly acceptable——"

"And remind you of fashions of the soul laid aside," thought the priest.

"She will declare that Assisi is fascinating," said Mrs. Reynolds.

“And after twenty-four hours, ask how long you intend to stay,” said Clare.

“She is only a few and twenty,” Mrs. Reynolds said gently. “She is a gay little girl, not given to introspection, but staunch under fire and merry of wit and tongue.” She paused. “But that is not all,” she continued. “Lloyd Benedict wants to stop here on his way up from Rome.”

Clare coloured again, but what Lloyd Benedict might say to her she did not reveal, and they chatted on concerning the hospitality of the *Evasio* and such limited cheer as could be commanded for the American guests.

“If that stupidest English woman would move, Gertie could have her little number six,” reflected Mrs. Reynolds. “That has the view of the cloister garden; but I don’t suppose the *Padrona* would dare propose it, so she will have to take number eleven on the side or go up another flight. I can get the *Padrona* to give her an extra chair, then with a table by the window for writing and lots of our bright Italian blankets for covers, and wild flowers——” Just then the *Padrona* appeared inside, and Mrs. Reynolds bustled after her, self-forgetful as always, in eager anticipation of the comfort of her friends.

The brightness died from Clare’s face. Even

the brilliant landscape from their favourite corner of the balcony went grey before her eyes of a sudden. For some minutes Father Bernardino continued his tramp up and down before her, his eyes never leaving his book. Then, as if moved to interrupt the silence of the morning, for he often walked there without more than a distant "*Bon giorno*,"—with them, but not of them,—unless some sympathetic occasion arose when his avoidance would become too pointed, he said coldly :

"You will be leaving Assisi soon together, I suppose? They have claimed you again. They are your world; it is right."

It was the first time he had spoken directly to her since the afternoon in the lower church. His voice sounded weary. She knew his hours of labour were many, his nights broken, his crosses unsuspected by the world about him and heavier than those of ordinary priests. She suspected also they were of his own choosing and voluntarily bound by himself upon his own back.

"Perhaps; I don't know," she replied indifferently. "You know the Hindoo has a tradition, or a proverb, that the soul of a man who has been shot is condemned to wander on eternally."

"Poor child!" he cried impulsively. "But you are not killed, you are only wounded. You

forgive, condone, return to your husband and take up your life again! I must speak of him to-day; you must not sin against the sacrament of marriage. I must save you that——”

She had risen and was looking straight at him with all the dignity and resolution of her Puritan ancestry. She was Clarissa as she spoke.

“I shall never return to my husband.” Her voice was very sweet but inflexible. He had spoken, had been constrained to speak,—he must go on even if her drawn face had warned him plainly to halt.

“To the Catholic you meditate a deadly sin.”

“If I were a Catholic I might find rest in one of these Italian cloisters,” she murmured, half frightened at herself. “They are the pasturage of soul. One might pray to come back to them after death.”

“No, in this you err, my daughter; peace would never come to you with evasion of duty. You are young and strong yet; you are a married woman, however much you may rebel. First be reconciled with your brother; then bring your gift to the altar—even yourself. There is a man you wrong hourly, leaving him to the seductions of the world. He is alone, carnal, tempted; no one intercedes for him with the holy Saints; his duties toward God are forgotten or neglected. Call him to your side, re-

spond to his necessity, admit his claim,—even his earthly charm, if needs be. Be true to your womanhood, to yourself, if not to him!”

“True to myself?” she echoed haughtily. “Man has no charm for me. I respond to Nature, to the starting sap and growth and harvest; but man, why, man has driven all the womanhood out of me.” She stopped to regain her composure. “My husband did not understand the value of truth,” she went on quietly. “He deceived me with kisses and between gifts; deceived me about nothing and everything. Kissed my eyes and stole my right to him from me; kissed my feet and misled me about his deceit. Deluded me until I forgot to expect anything else; till I could have shed tears of gratitude for substantiation of any trifling fact he had asserted. How long shall a woman bred in the contempt of untruth follow such a man as this? Until Balthasar gives another feast?” Her lips curled in its effort not to tremble.

“Yes, or until she lifts him up until he is little lower than the angels.”

“It is not true, it cannot be true, that truth was intended to live with untruth.”

“Truth unites, never severs,” he argued.

She caught the flaw unerringly.

“Truth unites with truth,” she amended. “It

has no affinity with untruth. A marriage with untruth is ugly, horrible; you have never been married, you cannot understand." She shuddered.

The priest paled until he was whiter than she. Was it at that cry "you cannot understand"? Was it a discovery of weakness in the divine order? His creed forbade marriage, his duty compelled celibacy, yet his imagination hovered, unforbidden. Her revulsion of feeling against all men made her opposition as strong as his own; he abstained from principle, she from reaction. He believed marriage good and holy, untried; she condemned it wholly bad and immoral, experienced. They approached the same goals by absolutely opposite paths, it would seem to the observer.

Nature had become to her what his church was to him, a sanctuary from the hunting angel of life. The lack of sex instinct in her puzzled him. An Italian woman whose blood had once raced to the measure of passion would never without dire pressure calm her pulse to normal temperatures again.

"And you never hope for the joy of your world again?" he asked, as if in spite of his judgment. But she was only a girlish antagonist, and her heart suffocated her logic as she rested her soft head against the rough vine trellis and her eyes overflowed.

"I wish I was an old, old woman," she whispered. "If I was only physically weak, it would be easier; but I am so strong—yet all the reason of my life seems gone away from me. All except Nature; she abides, and there are moments when I feel part of her. I am a pagan. I still conceive a pantheistic worship, a sort of rapture—then I remember, and it is all as it was before, only denser than ever?"

"Nature is very different in aspect in America?" he asked, giving her time to recover herself.

"Yes, it is more rugged, more primitive and personal. I knew the hills about my country home as only the Psalmist knows them. No one really knows them except the Psalmist and the shepherds and I," she answered gratefully. "They were all promise and prophecy to me when I was a girl, and now they must be their own fulfilment." She moved a little restlessly as if to finish the conversation, then with a sigh, "I have suffered too much," she said sadly.

"The holy Mother of God is called our Lady Sorrows. It is the glory of women to suffer—he began.

"I had not finished," she interrupted. "To suffer for the man she loves is a woman's pride suffer with him a tender happiness; but to ♣

through him is her humiliation, her martyrdom, a martyrdom whose unavailing bitterness your martyrs can know nothing of."

"God must indeed have honoured you, my child, if he singles you out above all the shining host of his beloved." The Father's voice was respectful, if caustic. "How greatly he has shown his favours unto you to lay upon you more than all which was borne by Blandina or the young Christians of the Roman arena, or Sebastian, or the others whose blood has nourished the church! You should aspire to nothing short of sainthood if you really believe yourself to have a vocation of surpassing martyrdom for truth."

Clare looked up at him dubiously.

"Father Bernardino, don't you believe in the conventional life for women?" She was a trifle abashed with him now.

"Under some circumstances, yes," he assented heartily. "If a woman is too weak to live well in the world; or if she has tried and failed, and fears to imperil her immortal soul by contact with the temptations that beset her frail mortal flesh. Never otherwise, save in the case of a few women who seem to have been born for nothing else?"

"But if a woman has missed or lost what she was born for," persisted Clare, "if she has no great

apparent duty, no human being whose welfare depends upon her courage?"

"It is rare to find a soul upon which no other has a claim——"

"But if her life has turned out to be a failure—a mistake——" she urged.

"God does not make mistakes," he said gravely. "Trust him."

"Would any other priest speak as you do? Why do you discourage me?" she asked.

"Because for a woman of your birth and intellect the world, and not the convent cell, is bound to be your battlefield." He smiled down at her as he added: "You do not consider how tired you would become of living incessantly in a community of women. There is one objection for you. Always the nuns. Never a man's brain to stimulate that American reason of yours."

"I am not even a Catholic," admitted Clare; "but the calm of the convent seems to appeal to me far more than to you—a holy Father!"

"I understand what it means. Perhaps I understand the nature of women better than you would conceive it possible. A priest learns many straight and hidden truths."

Clare listened intently.

"If you comprehend humanity so profoundly

me one secret,—why do men lie to women?" she insisted seriously.

"Falsehood," said the priest, "is the ægis oftenest raised by faulty man to parry the swift darts of feminine inquisition. Incredulity is an offence to him—as unbelief is a sin toward God."

How did he know? She thought a while and then all she said was: "And if women were born blind men would never be untrue? That is the argument? Ah, when shall we know, when shall we know?"

She was despairing again, and so he spoke to her half playfully, for he did know women, fatally to himself, far better than she could dream. Penance, the power of ancestry, and special dispensation had all been called upon to play their part in the making of his priesthood.

"You shall know," he continued, "when going hand in hand as dear children before the great white throne you shall say 'Dear God, our Father, please explain to us why man is man and woman is woman? And why it has pleased Thee in wisdom to create male and female——'"

"And perhaps he will ask us to kneel down upon a cloud," she said, catching his imagery, "and command angel songs for our spirit's refreshment, and then perhaps he will reveal us to ourselves."

An unwonted sound of confusion within warned them that they were no longer alone.

"Father Benardino," said Clare, with finality, "I thank you for all you have said to me, but you must never think of me as a married woman again; I forbid it."

She left him silenced and turned to enter the inn, just as Lloyd Benedict, coming out, filled the narrow doorway. He had but just arrived and, cheating his agitation as best he might under an assumption of unnatural naturalness exclaimed:

"What a jolly old hole! More than glad to find you here! Do you mind if I smoke?" And so the dreaded meeting was over and they might have parted only yesterday instead of years ago under romantic and on his side recriminative circumstances. For Lloyd had not come to her wedding though much bidden; he had ostentatiously sulked at home in the summer heat and been compared unfavourably for it by such of Clare's other lovers who were more lightly won to dance at the marriage and allow the Continental gaiety, mingled with over-much indulgence in Pommery Sec, to soften their impressions of personal regret.

Lloyd had, however, sent her a royal gift, and with it a letter, one sentence of which she had never been able to forget, which embarrassed her thought

of meeting him again. "If God will keep you safe and happy," he wrote, "I will never ask him anything for myself."

The question she asked herself now was did he consider the compact broken? The one-sided compact between himself and his Maker? He was a man of the broad-shouldered, clean-shaven type, every day growing more prevalent in his own country. His eyes were his confusing feature, having a trick of melting and becoming fond, even strangely intimate, without warning. His rugged face would not have comported illy with a cowl except for its intense expression of active voice denoting nothing in common with any of the required passivity of the church. "A business man on a holiday," he had proclaimed himself, when making money suddenly lost its zest one day, after the casual recital of Clare's separation by a chance vis-à-vis at the club.

The market sank into utter insignificance before his own loss, which rose before him magnified by the possibilities of future reparation.

Whatever might be going to happen, he intended to be near at hand to contest his prize with the rest of the world and Fate itself.

Gertie arrived in the afternoon perched on a pile of her own luggage that threatened to destroy her

as Carthage, by the falling of its own towers. The horse was a vicious-looking brute with one wall eye and a tongue that curled like that of the griffin. She fell Perugia down the side of his cheek. She fell the rickety cab into her aunt's arms, protesting and exclaiming, and scolding Clare between kisses, directing the disposal of her startlingly be-labell boxes, with an arm around each of them in spite the bags she had refused to surrender.

"Bottles!" she cried gaily; "tops lost or cracked something spilled already!" and indeed a wave mixed odours penetrated the air as she spoke.

"Clare, you darling! Dear Aunt Jessica! can't believe I am here!" and down she went on doorstep in search of the offending scent, scattering all sorts of toilet articles about her in reckless confusion until the offending bottle was produced a stream of sticky liquid down one side. "Disgusting!" and in a flash she had thrown it over the where it landed at the feet of a couple of ecclesiastics walking solemnly in the cloisters, bringing them back somewhat rudely in fact of a material world outside their enclosure.

That was so like Gertie! No one could continue to be unaware of her presence. She herself eventful just through her own pet. Her aunt rejoiced in her anew.

"Come and see the Evasio," said Clare, drawing her away.

"It is a dream!" declared Gertie. "A perfect dream! Who was that sample copy of a handsome priest de luxe just going by?" she asked, suddenly turning back to the window. "I saw another one like him on the way over; younger, but very much the same."

Clare's face showed a mixture of consternation and amusement.

"Oh, Gertie!" she remonstrated, "how can you? Father Benardino is a saint, almost. No one thinks of speaking lightly of him, and poor Paolo, whom you met on the way over here, is not in the least like him. He is only a young novizio, as they call it,—studying for orders, I mean."

"They all look as alike to me as cats by night," retorted Gertie, unconvinced; "these two especially."

"How quickly you notice every trifle," commented Clare. "I have been here over a week and never saw the slightest resemblance. No one could resemble Father Benardino," she added softly, as if to herself. Gertie flashed a keen glance at her as they climbed up the steep winding stairway, and it happened that Father Benardino, on entering, was obliged to step over strange and unfamiliar objects

on the doorsteps, rather suggestive of the overturning of some high altar by a vandal horde.

He stood a minute regarding the silver and embroidery lying about, and entered puzzling, to be confronted by great trunks crowding the hallway whose assertive lettering, *D. C., U. S. A.*, met him like goblins of departed peace. His ears were struck by a continuous voice above, whose accents were unknown. He turned a moment and glanced toward the porch; it was empty. "The Americans," he sighed, as he stepped back and left the inn to its own devices.

Half an hour later the *cocchiere* demanded an interview with Gertie.

"He wants to see me? Me?" repeated Gertie. Her voice was shrill when she was annoyed and a half an octave with every interrogation. "But I don't want to see him! I won't see him."

Biancha curtsied and withdrew, but soon returned.

"The Signorina had probably forgotten," the *cocchiere* demanded his pay.

"I paid him at Perugia. Tell him so!"

"*Comanda, Signorina,*" and Biancha went downstairs only to reappear all blushes to say true the fare was paid, but the *cocchiere* would drink to the health of the *bella American*

"But he has drank it! He has drowned himself in it all the way over from Perugia. I won't see him; I am deadly afraid of them all, and I can't speak a word of Italian to him anyway. His horse has the evil eye too. My heart never sinks as low as when I have to reckon with one of these bandit cabbies!"

Biancha seemed loath to depart, and the fellow clamoured loudly below, amid other voices that were trying to quell the uproar. Gertie snatched her purse and ran down to the click of her own French heels to find Lloyd surveying the riot. The landlady, Beppo, the *cocchiere*, and a stray peasant at the bar all hotly indulging in a wordy affray.

"Stop it!" commanded Gertie. "Stop it this instant!" and she threw a lira at the infuriated driver, that might have put his eyes out but didn't; at which, instead of cursing her, he began to cringe and bless and the others disappeared as if nothing had occurred to interrupt their occupation.

"Why, Lloyd, how do you do?" said Gertie, in the ensuing lull. "I have come, you see."

"Yes, so I rather inferred," he replied. "Your whirlwind is in your wake as usual. About this time look out for cyclones, the almanac said."

"I shan't pass like a cyclone this time," said Gertie. "I shall continue more like an equinoc-

tial!" She looked quickly up at the window as if afraid of being overheard.

Now you might not like Gertie,—Lloyd did not always,—but you could not live without her. Once addicted to her she became a habit as clinging as vermouth. Indeed her faithful had once dubbed her Absinthe—the poor man's drink. Lloyd spoke of her as a Gertie cocktail. The place became full of her instantly upon her arrival, permeated by her vitality. The long balcony broke out as if by some magical flowering with Roman silk bags from which embroidery or huge knitting needles protruded. "Golf stockings for Don," Gertie advertised them, but so weird in anatomy they would have presupposed deformity on the part of her absent adorer's extremities. Later her rain-coat hung in the hall with a tam o' shanter astride it, a bag of golf sticks stood near by: even the sitting-room was enlivened by her pervasive personality. The Valse Bleu and Sourire d'Avril laughing at their environment,—reminiscent of Arminoville and the Café de Paris! Her silver pens and monogram stationery dared the light-fingered travelling public on the writing table, a book of photographs taken in every quarter of the globe lay open on a chair. Gloves soon reminded one of her everywhere; her mouchoirs became prevalent. By every courier came packages

from Perugia or Rome of forgotten belongings; her racquet, a lace blouse, her mother's picture and finally a book which she did not open on the balcony, surmised from her unusual reticence to have been her Bible.

"I was so excited about seeing you all, I only wonder I did not leave more!" she cried in excuse as she hailed her truant property.

"What brought you here anyway, little sister of joy?" Lloyd asked her as they met on the balcony in the moonlight after dinner. "You are looking uncommon smart. Are you going in for a Sisterhood? Got a retreat on?"

"No, I am going in for settlement work," she replied demurely.

"I am slumming myself; come along?" and he smoked on carelessly, trying not to listen as Clare and Father Bernardino exchanged the evening salutation in the hall.

"What might you be by way of doing here yourself?" asked Gertie in return.

"Studying social questions," he answered gravely.

"Social questions? At Assisi?" Her shrill voice began to run up the scale incredulously. "Why don't you go and study electric traction in Venice? You might as well. Of course I sup-

posed you had come for the races!" she concluded mockingly.

"Oh, well, call me a hanger-on," he said; "that profession has all provinces for its own."

"We are both here for the identical reason that Aunt Jessica wanted us, I suppose, in reality," she said, lowering her staccato voice.

"I am not," differed Lloyd; "I am here because nobody wanted me."

"To make them want you?" suggested she archly.

"Perhaps," he admitted.

"What a picture they make together!" she exclaimed as she turned toward Clare and her mother framed in by the low doorway. "But Clare's sleeves ought to be larger—how odd they make her look!"

"I never think about her gowns."

"Then why did you speak about mine?"

"There is a subtle difference between frocks and wings," mused Lloyd.

"Clare does not dress any too well," asserted Gertie.

"You do, far too well," he retorted. "You look as if you were always just going to the races at Autuil! I believe I will stroll," he added abruptly, going in.

"They are all hipped; every one of them, by this place," remarked Gertie to the moon. "I shall be staring at nothing, myself, in a day or two if I don't beware." And she went resolutely inside and began to knit furiously, widening instead of narrowing, to the confusion of the human pattern set by creation for the nether limbs of its *chef d'œuvre*.

The priest had gone out as usual; his world did not seem to include Gertie and Lloyd. His creed was of one faith, one baptism; narrow, but deep as the grave. The excitement of Holy Week showed itself in the fagged expression about his eyes, and Mrs. Reynolds wished he had been a more mortal sort of a fellow-creature that she might have cheered him or even dosed him a bit till he was once more in condition. Gertie was plainly overawed by him.

"When you are shy you are irresistible!" Lloyd had once told her; adding hastily, "But who ever saw Gertie shy?"

She was shy with the Jesuit, however, or perhaps it was only constraint arising from all he represented to her American imagination. A lover of the Red Woman, a subtle servant of the secret will of the Pope, a sort of divinely appointed Sherlock Holmes, she described him, amusing them all by her attempts to analyse the impression he made on her during their brief introduction.

But why had Clare flushed and seemed uneasy? It was not patriotic of her, not American nor true to the First Congregational church of Summerfield.

"Lloyd is far handsomer than this Father," she said suddenly, counting stitches in between, while her knitting needles endangered her own bright eyes.

"Why do you knit with masts?" asked Clare.

Gertie paid no attention to the interruption. "And yet if the priest had on regular togs from a good tailor, he would attract more attention in Bond Street than Lloyd. He is not emaciated," she continued, "neither does he burn with a hectic flush or look pasty, like so many of those Roman friars. He would be big enough for the Yale eleven. Eight, nine, ten," she counted. "Unless his gown makes him look bigger than he really is. Twelve, thirteen, fourteen. Oh, dear! I have dropped another stitch; these will have to be open-work stockings, after all! It is all the priest's fault, too I declare, I sometimes wish this knitting had no come into my life at all!" She laid it down with a long sigh as if accepting the inevitable. "The orange blossoms must be in full bloom in Amherst now," she said without apparent connection. "At least they were a year ago at this time when they were there. When will they bloom here,

they bloomed and gone?" But no one answered her. Perhaps neither Lloyd nor Clare nor the priest even cared to remember orange blossoms just then!

Monotony is so dear to the invalid spirit! When Clare parted from the rest for the night a mantle of weariness fell over her. She drew her hand across her brow with a perplexed little movement as she sat thinking, thinking, of other days past and to come. Assisi seemed less lonely under the solitary shadow of the cathedral than since the eagle had perched above its tranquil heights. Freedom seemed at variance with these restrained surroundings of peace. She wondered if Gertie's nonsense and Lloyd's uncommon common sense were to wholly replace Father Benardino's conversations. His face rose sharply before her. Had he too been disappointed? He was not handsomer than Lloyd, but, oh, far more distinguished! His enunciation was a charm in itself, clear cut from Latin scholarship and familiarity with many tongues.

To religion through religion's priest is the immemorial rule with the hearts of women. Clare fell asleep blending the alleluia of the Easter anthem with her last waking memory, parting from earth and day on the wings of its flight heavenward.

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CHAPTER VI

THE ORDER OF POOR CLARES

GRADUALLY peace disturbed adjusted itself, and life moved calmly on, absorbing the less harmonious elements. Relations established themselves with incredible ease, a cordial formality between the two men which seemed on the fair way to ripen into friendship, if given an opportunity. Already Clare felt the priest to be her friend, and admitted to herself the influence he unconsciously exerted over her. Gertie, whom he at first avoided, he seemed now to enjoy as keenly as his cloth permitted; a little anxious as to her raids on serious subjects, but always indulgent. Mrs. Reynolds was taking a breathing space, off guard since Clare had other companionship,—rarely joining them in their daily rambles, but offering her evenings as the social rialto on which the adventures of the day were presented in mutual exchange.

Five people of like breeding and taste can live together all through the long spring days fair and stormy weather, where the locomotive never thunders and the honk of the motor horn

unknown, without a constant sense of growing intimacy. Father Benardino often brought books to Clare now; books of instruction answering some of the vague questions she asked him, varied with lives of the saints, sometimes a pamphlet of his own; but she sat and stared over them at Umbria, making small progress, and often sadly ashamed of her truant wits when he examined her by a careless reference or kindly question. Mrs. Reynolds shook her head in secret over this new listlessness. It was unlike Clare. She seemed to have relaxed perceptibly since Gertie's arrival, laying the burden of chat upon her and sinking back into herself. After two natures have borne a great strain together, there comes an inevitable reaction. Both Mrs. Reynolds and Clare shrank from the memory of their past year together. Lloyd's presence and Gertie's spirits were a welcome relief from the tension of their love.

Those who love us best cannot always afford us the indifference that we crave. Clare was grateful now to be less observed; to yield to braver hearts the weary cheerfulness of demeanour so pathetically at variance with her courage. All of which Mrs. Reynolds noted and resolved to counteract. So it happened that the idle mornings on the balcony were superseded by vagrant sight-seeing, interspersed

with much Chianti and many sandwiches. Father Benardino was more sympathetic with her apathy.

"Her forces are spent," he said. "Where could she better find rest than here where so many distinguished pilgrims have come seeking repose after labour or suffering? Many weary ones beside the Popes sought refreshment here in earlier times," he mused, as if for his own benefit. "Count Guido of Montrefelto among them,—a warrior of the mediæval intrigue and bloodshed, who left his castle halls to prepare for a good death,—and to watch the stars over the walls of the monastery garden by night, he prayed by day——"

"What became of him?" asked Gertie.

"He went to the aid of Pope Boniface and became immersed again in Italian politics, the blood of the Ghibelline leader was too strong in him for resistance."

"What about his soul?" It was Clare who spoke.

"History says that Pope Boniface soothed his scruples by a complete absolution, 'even before the committal of his sin' if he but counsel him 'that Penestrino cumber earth no more,' but Da put him in the eighth gulf of hell for his treach and the church believes his purgatory of thv severe."

As the priest was silent they waited till he should continue, and Gertie, growing impatient, asked again:

“Who were some of the others who came here then?”

“There were many royal visitors attracted by the spacious halls of the monastery who came in summertime to pray by the tomb of St. Francis. It was a very different retreat then,” he explained, —“than that established by the Saint for his followers. The Portiuncula was the result of the Saint’s realisation of the humanity of his disciples. It was founded as a resting place ‘Where like tired birds long on the wing’ they could return, after distant pilgrimage and continued effort among the troublous world, to peaceful meditation, prayer, and the quiet labour of the brotherhood.”

As he spoke the wisdom and tenderness of the saint seemed to have imbued the Jesuit, lingering over the beautiful legends of the Umbrian prophet, which will never grow old.

“Tell us about Sister Lark,” urged Clare.

Gertie threw herself down on the step to listen as he repeated the stories of the birds and their affectionate intercourse with him. How St. Francis exclaimed: “Sister Lark hath a hood like the religious and her raiment—to wit, her feathers—

resemble the earth, and when she soars she praises God most sweetly." And again, how for love of his feathered brothers and sisters he besought "Mayors of all cities and Lords of all castles to scatter grain on the roads by the walled towns on the Feast of Nativity, that the birds might rejoice with their fellow-men." He had scarcely finished repeating St. Francis famous sermon to the birds of Assisi when Lloyd strolled down the lower piazza and joined them on the balcony.

"The *concierge* says we must go the Convent of Santa Clara to-day," he announced. He had been having another of their one-sided conversations, wherein each spoke his mother tongue understanding nothing of the other, but mutually satisfied and pleased with his own performance. "He is a character, that fellow," continued Lloyd. "I enjoy his society more every day, though he does not speak Dante or even appear to be fluent in sonnets! I recite 'Il Paradiso' to him, notably,

"'Lasciate ogni speranza, chi voi entrate!'

hoping he will go me one better with a canto from the 'Vita Nuova,' but he only says 'Si, si, si, signor! *Molta, molta, bella!*' My university would be proud of my accent, but the conversation does not thrive nevertheless."

"What did he say about the convent?" asked Gertie.

"As far as I can make out he has but a poor opinion of the race; but he admits that everybody goes to see Santa Clara—even the tourists of a day, that eat without drinking, take no *siesta* after, and leave nothing behind them in the hand of a laborious and honest *concierge!*"

"And rightly too," commended Father Bernardino. "For there is no more thrilling story in the lives of the Saints than that of the conversion of the Donna Chiara Scifi, who founded the order."

"Tell us the story of it," pleaded Gertie. "Tell us now before we go to see the convent."

So he told them very briefly of the daughter of the haughty Count Scifi, who was owner of a palace in the town as well as the castle among the great ilex trees farther up the steep hillside of Mount Subasio, from whence it looked arrogantly down upon the humble pilgrims of the plain. How she was born of a pious mother whose vision before the child's birth promised that from her should rise a light so bright and clear that the darkness of earth should be illuminated thereby, and how when her mediæval father turned from his fighting long enough to find her telling a rosary of pebbles in odd corners of the lonely castle, after the manner of the

poor frairs instead of at her play, he mocked her infant prayers and threatened her with many threats. "What a sad game for a little child," said Clara with quick commiseration.

"Not so bad as portentous to him," said the priest, "for he had already destined her to be the bride of a notable Assisi. His will was set up for this marriage, and he liked not that the most devoted of all his daughters should substitute such manner of amusement for herself. But the barred windows of her bridegroom's lofty palace were not for her; he exulted with a note of triumph in his mellow voice. "A vision of peace and purity had flown straight to her across the wilderness of the Middle Ages in the message of Saint Francis."

"How did she get into communication with him? She was a noble's daughter and he just the wandering beggar peered at by the children in the streets."

Gertie foresaw difficulties in the course of even conventual love in the disparity of social conditions.

"She heard him preach, I suppose, in the marketplace or wherever the people thronged about him. The house of Scifi, like other noble houses, must have often betaken itself to hear the mendicant friar whose reputation was always increasing. The vision he presented to her eyes her father's commands were powerless to wipe out."

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“The Poverello was no longer a beggar, but the founder of an order sanctioned by the Pope when he first was bidden to preach in the parish church of the Scifi, and the Donna Chiara was just eighteen,” said Mrs. Reynolds prophetically. “What a culmination of all her girlish dreams it must have been to her!”

The priest turned a glowing face toward her as if in appreciation of her sympathy.

“I like to fancy the consternation of the poor monk, madame, when at the conclusion of his sermon the beautiful young Contessa threw herself at his feet—besought him to aid her in a new life!” he exclaimed impulsively.

“Others had done it before her; she was not the first,” said Clare, recalling her reading of St. Francis and his followers.

“Men had often followed him, surely?” he corrected. “But a woman, young and beautiful and of so proud a house! Small wonder the poor friar was nonplussed.”

“What did he do with her?” asked Gertie. “He could not marry her, and a stray girl on his hands, with nothing but a briar rose-bed he could call his own, sounds like an embarrassing situation—even for a wonder-working saint!”

Father Benardino overlooked her as he might

a whirling butterfly that crossed the upper air, & he proceeded:

“Thinking to prove her sincerity, he sent her exactly as he had sent many a poor brother before her, to beg from door to door, clad only in sack cloth, with covered head. As her piety but increased through this test, he believed her vocation to be a true one and swore to help her escape and take the veil. On Palm Sunday she received the Sacrament, with all her house, and that night, attired in the simple girlish finery and adornments of the holy *fiesta*, she left her father’s house forever—to become the bride of Christ.”

“Who let her out? How did she get away?” they chorused.

“Her own frail hand tore away the masonry that covered a secret door. Her flight was not covered until next day, when tidings reached distracted parents of her safety with the Benedictine nuns near Favia.”

“She was of age,” remarked Lloyd to “They could not oblige her to go back again will.”

The priest did not seem to hear him.

“Tears, prayers, threats were unavailing” continued eagerly. “This child, always so obedient, refused to return to her home or a

bridegroom; it was only after long entreaty, when she laid one hand on the altar and with the other lifted her veil that they might see her shaven head and accept her decision, they knew it to be inexorable."

"What must her lover have been like to drive her to that!" cried Gertie, her eyes fixed on Clare's gleaming halo. "And what became of her after that?"

"Her Sister Agnes joined her, suffering persecution and receiving miraculous deliverance, and, foreseeing the power of such noble example, the Benedictines gave to Saint Francis the chapel of San Damiano, where with his own hands he built a few rude cells for the 'Poor Ladies,' where they might spend their days in work and prayer."

"Did they ever come up to Assisi?" demanded Gertie pityingly. "What could they do if they never went out anywhere?"

"They were very closely restricted," replied Father Bernardino; "they were not allowed to go beyond their boundaries, but they spun the woollen stuff of which the frairs' habits were made and the finest of white linen for the service of the sacred altar. The poor were always seeking their aid, and the sick were often tended in the little mud hut which they used as a hospital."

No one heeded Gertie's exclamation: "What merry round of dissipations!"

A melancholy shadow rested on Father Benadino's eyes.

"It was a wider life than came to the women of the thirteenth century from the narrow windows so high in the towers of their lords! And surely more full of peace," he said firmly.

"And is that all her story?" said Clare wistfully.

"No, only the beginning of it, for through her the women of her time were guided to higher air. Her friendship for the Saint himself was an unfailingly blessed support. There are countless stories of the sweetness, the courage, the influence of this quiet saint whose entire life was spent in the cloister of the Spoletan valley, and many are royal and noble in the world's rating who entered her Sisterhood of Poor Clares."

He ceased speaking and Biancha came forward to seek him. Reverently she gave her message; her eyes sparkled with the light of youth, but they were cast modestly down toward his face.

"It is the poor hermit of the Carceri, my father, the one with the evil eye, who demands a word from your holiness." She made the familiar sign with her fingers to ward off calamity, as she should have done, but she did not truly interrupt your holiness with g

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ut a maid cannot bring down evil on her head, and if he cursed me,"—she shrugged her shoulders, adding: "*Mi scusi!*"

She was pretty to distraction as she stood looking after Father Bernardino, who hurried away with merely a grave bow to the Americans. Her scarlet lips, as they pouted dislike of the malicious peasant, outdid the colour of the full-blown rose she had stuck in her massive hair. Her hands, seeking her hips as she waited, emphasised the full curve of her supple bodice.

They set off for their morning pilgrimage rather less gaily than common, the impression of Father Bernardino's story lingering with them as they went, first, to the modern convent which so well concludes the eastern end of Assisi, where the poor cloistered nuns see no human face save through their iron grating, toiling not after the happy manner of the ancient ladies of the order, in their mud huts o'er-grown with pomegranate flowers, but given over to prayer and fasting.

Alas for the ideal of the original poor Clare and her valiant opposition to two Popes! Although she maintained her order, whose rule brought tears to the eyes of Cardinal Ugolino by its severity, refusing to have it mitigated or to be absolved from the extremity of her vows, her worshippers have

erected a cathedral as her monument, whither her body was borne, followed by her despairing nuns, who begged to be sheltered near her. The hospital of old St. Georgio was rebuilt to form their convent, and grim enough it is between its grey stone and aging of the centuries. It might be in perpetual mourning garb, so little is there of cheer or comfort suggested by its sad outline. There they live in absolute poverty, owning no earthly possession, and their campanile looks up at the ancient palace of the Scifi as if conscious of the triumph of an ideal over time or man's trifling grandeur. The cloister with its narrow windows and sombre walls throws a sad shadow over the outdoor memory of the simpler lives of those earlier saints, but the church, with its alternations of faint rose and cream-coloured stone, catching the sunbeams of the morning as they cross the piazza or deepened by the twilight shades, has a beauty almost feminine in its charm. Here rests the body of the girl saint the rule of the order in her hand, in the other a lily. By her side two nuns pray so silently that in ' hush only the dripping of their beads is audil or it is perhaps the heart beat of the Seri Mother?

At the little chapel of St. Damiano afterw
lips of the attendants overflowed in confir

Father Benardino's story and its affectionate supplement.

It is here in this humble chapel just outside the walls that one feels the abiding presence of Santa Chiara to-day. Here where even the faithful hills seem falling on their knees, kneeling in distant homage to her memory, it is easy to conjure the thirteenth century atmosphere. Friars, peasants, Popes and their Cardinals, lords and ladies again troop by this lowly door of prayer. Again one hears the chanting from within as the bees in some sunny bed of cloister balms.

"There are but few relics preserved here now," the attendant assured them; "the choir of Santa Chiara is unchanged and the persecuted crucifix of wonder-working power; but not even these bring the pilgrims here to pray; ah, no, only the marvel of the story of St. Francis and St. Clare."

Mrs. Reynolds and Gertie followed him as he talked, deeper within the chapel, but Clare preferred the garden of the saint, which is on a level with the oratory. Lloyd and she came out where the other Clare was wont to walk and tend her flowers, where a row are still kept blooming for her sake. The voice of the sacristan was flowing on endlessly inside the convent, but the open hillside seemed to this modern Clare more nearly to approach the van-

ished spirit of the girl saint. These were the same fields, the same wooded hillsides, brave with their groves of oak and olive, across whose paths of grass the Donna Chiara Scifi sped with her shivering servants in the night, to be met upon her way by the chanting friars who came out with torches to conduct her to the chapel of the Portiuncula, where her vows were taken and the ensnaring glory of her golden hair shorn away. Again, it was across these same fields all wet with glistening dew and overlaced with olive films, that good St. Francis, completing his deed of "spiritual knight errantry," led her to the convent of the welcoming Benedictines, turning from the little chapel at dawn, after the administration of the sacrament, just as the first light of a new day touched the valley, and, falling athwart a pile of jewels lying discarded on the altar, flowed aside to transfigure the soft coils of a maiden's golden hair, over which the simple friars greatly marvelled, troubled, yet at the same time glad.

"Santa Clara," murmured Lloyd absently.

"How strange! I never realised that her name and mine were the same before," said Clare. "St. Bernardino is, why that must be, Father Bernardino!"

"And the devil who was so greatly jealous

much goodness in the legend of holiness, is cast for me, I suppose!" Lloyd laughed, but he looked as if a new and ungrateful idea had entered his mind from the morning's study of local history.

It was some time before the others joined them.

"They are both intelligent sight-seers when their blood is up, but I would not have thought this of Gertie!" cried Lloyd at last, feeling a desire to smoke.

"Don't call anyone I love intelligent!" protested Clare. "Intelligence prevents personality, obstructs thought, murders imagination, and hinders heaven!"

"The Catholic Church is not in danger of being cursed with it, anyway," he retorted, and then saw his mistake in her flushing face.

Fortunately Mrs. Reynolds came out into the brightness at that moment.

"You really should have stayed to hear him describe the opening of her tomb," she said. "It was buried so deeply it was believed to be lost, and when they found it in the crypt below St. Georgio, and it was opened in the presence of the nuns, the sweetness of the thyme in which she was embalmed by the sorrowing sisters who robed her in her little brown habit, had preserved its fragrance and rose

about her like the incense of generations who had loved her."

"I like what he told us about the little old window," cried Gertie. "How, when the Saracen troops pillaged the country and tried to overpower them, climbing up a ladder to force their way in, she met the soldier at the top round, holding the Sacrament; and he was blinded by so great a light,"—consulting her guide book for the finish, whereupon postal cards and faded flowers rained in profusion from the open leaves.

"You are like Father Benardino," said Clare. "You find a nunnery stupid without a man in it! Even if he only tries to get in at the window!"

"Poor ladies!" sighed Gertie. "I should think they would have prayed for burglars!"

"Gertie will never be lost to us in a convent, thank God!" said Lloyd.

"No, she would prefer a monastery," said her aunt.

"Ah, but the Pope came to see these nuns," began Clare.

"When they had flattened their noses a becoming and sufficient season against the gratings, the dead body of St. Francis was borne up to too—oh, yes, I was hasty! They had my joy."

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But Clare's face stopped her, and she began to feel as cold and creepy as she had in the cheerless chapel.

Could it be that such a place appealed to Clare? What was the matter with the world of late? Everything seemed out of drawing. There was Clare looking as if she saw St. Francis coming up to the convent by the vineyard path to ask the prayers of the Poor Ladies, and Aunt Jessica pretending to be searching her purse for "piccolo centesimi" for the poorbox on the garden door, but really slipping in gold on the sly; all the time keeping her wet eyes cast down that they might pass unobserved. As for Lloyd, he might have been the fighting Count of Scifi pursuing his wayward daughter, from the scowl of his brow. Surely the haunts of the Poor Clares was a depressing excursion, and with all her wiles she exerted herself to draw them away from the narrow vistas visible between those high garden walls of the convent out into the secular, worldly weather.

Such loiterings as these were no cure for Clare's morbidity! What was Aunt Jessica thinking of, and who was to be responsible for the result? Did they want to send Clare off into a gibbering retreat? And if not, why was she allowed to roam over these cloistral slopes like a disembodied spirit?

"I am perfectly sick!" cried Gertie suddenly; "I must have caught something in there,"—indicating the retreat of the Poor Ladies,—"or else it is contempt for that bishop who had the frescoes whitewashed because they attracted visitors and the nuns got an instant's natural distraction looking at them a scrap at a time through that cruel iron grating between their chapel and the congregation!"

They moved slowly toward the door.

"I think I will walk on a little faster, and perhaps some exercise will set me right," she added.

"Try a *petite verre* when you get to the inn, Gertie; they are good for Scotch mists!" Lloyd called after her, but she did not hear him, for at the corner by the rival hostelry she ran into a group of young priests that took her attention, and then a blind beggar accosted her, and the last they saw of her she was racing some screaming children down the steep road in front of the Subasio.

"Isn't she a darling to stay here?" Clare exclaimed.

"She is at least a sport," admitted Lloyd. "No one will ever make a Poor Clare of her!"

"She is out of her element here, and yet she pretends to adore it—because of me," said Clare softly.

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"Well, so do I," replied Lloyd, "and I am not a candidate for the order either."

"Even Poor Clare?" She was like herself for a moment as she smiled up at him, and Clare's mouth had a smile, the sweetness of which no other mouth could learn; an undoing, enervating sort of smile, such as Leonardo loved, and for sake of which cities have fallen.

"I have always belonged to her order," he said gravely, "and always shall. It was not necessary to come to Assisi to take my vows, they were sworn long ago. This is my book of the rule: listen." And he began to recite the canonisation of St. Clare by Pope Boniface.

*"Clara Claris preclara meritis—
O admiranda Clarae, beata Claritis!"*

Very silently now they passed on through the narrow streets together. Gertie's beggar jangled a lonely copper in his tin cup at them and then cursed their indifference until Lloyd went back to pacify him in his greed. He had not intended to say that to Clare, but the impulse had risen from the impression of the morning. He felt shaken. So that was what the priest was up to? What part was Count Variani to play? And Clare herself? Seen always through the prism of her temperament,

one could not prognosticate surely what colour would prevail.

Meantime she was strolling on alone. Something in Lloyd's voice had stirred sleeping fires. She went back again over the past, her past with Count Variani. Oh, if he had died! cried her heart within her. How she would have gone forever sorrowing, yet blest! Her life broken, but not worn thin in hateful, wasteful bitterness. She remembered the brilliant shifting scenes of their courtship; the fascinations of her Roman lover that had so overpowered her; the recklessness of his wooing; his prodigality; the seriousness with which he had accepted every lightest caprice of hers as a bond the more to bind her slave to her service. Then moments of old ecstasy smote her. The hours of enamoured languor turned her faint again. Many were the vistas down which she dared not glance. Her mind was possessed of snowy Alps, of moonlit waters, of far-away gardens deep in shade, of monumental cities and Venetian colour, steeped in love, embalmed in emotion. Then the vision of his eyes, the tones of his voice, were overtaken by those later disillusionings, the unmasking of his soul.

"If you have my soul, what matters it to you who has my body?" he had once demanded of her. Oh, shameful, cruel disillusion! And how his mouth

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had learned to sneer, how the light died out of his wonderful eyes when they were turned toward her, his wife, the only woman to whom he was not unceasingly deferential, of whom he was not to outward appearance the lover. How she had been obliged to admit herself worsted, step by step. broken in the game of life, in which she, the girl, was no fit adversary for him—the profligate.

Were life to bring them face to face, could she prevail? Life, love, the church, nature, duty, spoke in a confused chorus; exonerating, claiming. Again her heart cried out within her, Oh, if life were untarnished! If life were hers all over from the start, she would not waste the precious thing called youth a second time. The order of Poor Clares would not be crushing her strength out of her as it seemed to be doing now. Poor Clares indeed! Buried alive away from love and happiness at eighteen; all unaware of passion save in the mystic union with their idea of their God, yet saved the soul's despair of a soul's shivering contact with the unclean.

The fervent May noontide went blind before her. And now what was left? what remained to her if the answer was not at hand in the sombre convent whose narrow windows admitted but a sparing hint of the Umbrian valley in its romantic springtime

beauty? Would the day ever come, when in some remote, pale hour, she should say as that other Clare had said upon her deathbed: "Sister, I am speaking with this little soul of mine, now blest, to whom the glory of Paradise is already opening"?

A reaction flew through her veins like wine. There was a change in her whole manner when Lloyd overtook her—that set his pulses rhyming with hers and the bells a-ringing in his head.

"Have we ever told you about Gertie's blind beggar in Florence?" she asked him lightly. "She could not rid herself of him by saying 'niente' or 'vattene,' so she gave him a regular salary not to curse her when she passed him at the hotel door,—so many lira a month,—and he used to open his eyes and wink at his yellow dog every time she paid him, and usually whenever she went in or out, unless some of us were watching."

"It would cost Gertie more than she is worth in some cases," laughed Lloyd. "Cursing is a luxury, I'll admit, almost the only one to which men are born free and equal." And their spirits fled away from the sober preoccupation of the morning after the natural manner of youth, that shrinks from contact with the supernatural, within or without its own mysterious being.

CHAPTER VII

AT THE PORTA SUSANNA

THEIR excursion to Perugia was the result of this same conspiracy to combat the continuance of Clare's apathy, as well as in the interest of the American guests who were becoming frankly bored by the remorseless serenity of the Seraphic City.

Clare wanted them to see the Cambria first, where her beauty-loving eyes fed delightedly upon Perugino's youthful Virtues. Steadfast figures, yet immature and hardly equal to the burden of their mediæval armour, but with eyes of faith that saw over the ramparts of difficulty into Paradise won. Mrs. Reynolds, however, was firm in adhering to her own programme. The Pinacotek should come first in their progress, after that St. Peter's, and a glimpse of the convent of Monte Luce; then they might squander their afternoon as they chose.

Lloyd interested himself in watching Clare as she flitted through the many long galleries in quest of her favourite pictures, sometimes calling Gertie to enjoy them with her, oftener alone. The contrast

of the two girls was always arresting. One so intense and harmonious with the foreign setting, the other so piquantly herself in spite of the influence of any surroundings. Clare had been sheltered from life and led in the bright paths which she accepted unquestionably, while Gertie, early left an orphan, had looked at people and things as they are learning values for herself at their actual worth, her head ruling her heart not so much through studied calculation as a lack of emotional imagination or the habit of idealising illusion. She was spontaneous to a fault, but mindful of consequences likely to be disagreeable, before committing herself to any action, and, though apparently impulsive, her nature was better balanced than her cousin's; her enemies would have said less unselfish. Fortune had been faithful to her, and her friends were easily legion. If an entire circle dropped out of sight she would join another beckoning coterie without regret; there was always someone to play with Gertie beyond that she had not cared as yet. Her astonishing frankness struck oddly against Clare's reserve. But it was a frankness tempered with cool judgment, and never infringed upon her own secrets, for even Lloyd could not worry a hint of her own private affairs out of her by his most accomplished schemes of teasing. He had long ago

decided that "Gertie was deep, in nothing more so than her evident nothing-withholdingness." He joined them as they stood together before a delicious Madonna of San Georgio, in which the face has a suspicion of Mona Lisa under its surface beauty, like a glint of light under still water.

"She looks more like a Magdalen than a Lady of Sorrows," he remarked.

"Yes," rejoined Gertie, with her head critically on one side, "and her attendant saint looks more like her lover than a worshipper."

"Ah, but remember how mellow the relation was between the painter of the Renaissance and his model," said Mrs. Reynolds. "The Virgin was no mere supernatural ideal from Jewish history, conceived in her completion by ardent mariolotry; she was some pure and winsome peasant girl who came to him daily to sit for his ideal, often until she became his own Madonna with his own child in her arms."

"Those dead artists had the inward vision bestowed upon them in rare measure," said Clare.

"Yes, but more often than not they absorbed and uplifted their subject through the element of personal warmth. That is a touch of humanity not wholly despicable," added Mrs. Reynolds, whose philosophy of life was older than theirs, accepting

alloy gratefully, since, through it, pure gold became possible. Tolerance is a matter not of years, but of gift, or sometimes of acquirement; it was hers in gracious measure. Gertie had moved on as they talked. She always did her galleries on a gallop and astonished everyone afterward by the extent and accuracy of her recollection.

"Come and see this St. Nicholas valiantly spiking hell unassisted!" she called.

"Please notice, Gertie, that hell is here composed chiefly of women," said Lloyd after a rapid survey. "Another revelation of the Renaissance character, *cara signora?*" he asked, turning to Mrs. Reynolds.

"If you did but notice it, the faces here are all variations of one type," she answered; "the vent of some personal spite, I fancy—some women who would not consent to make the painter's heaven, and was condemned by him to a painted future punishment for revenge."

"Woman as the temptress appealed to every painter of the golden age in Italy," said Clare. "The Catholic books are full of her, and in their art Eve is more popular than any other subject after the Virgin. They approach her with a mingling of curiosity, for her charm and malevolence, for the weakness of man's fall."

"She is held responsible for all our troubles, ever

in our own church, but we don't do her half the justice these fellows did," said Lloyd admiringly, as his eyes wandered to yet another "Temptation" near at hand. "Adam ought to have fallen to save his own self-respect, if such a being as this asked him to! A gentleman could not do less; but I don't know as Adam was a gentleman——"

"How far would she tempt you?" teased Gertie.

"What would tempt you, Lloyd; anything?"

"I don't believe anything would, to a course Lloyd's manhood disapproved—I won't even mention conscience."

It was Clare who spoke. He did not remove his eyes from the Eve in her moulding gilt frame as he replied for himself coldly:

"A man who denies himself capable of temptation is either a hypocrite or a prig."

They remembered the sentence afterward; it fell lightly enough upon them then. Mrs. Reynolds moved aside to one of Lippo Lippi's Virgins.

"There is just as much of the painter as there is of his subjects in all these old paintings," she said, returning to her interrupted argument. "These Virgins are all fickle Lippi's peasant loves transfigured more or less, according to exigence or inspiration. Andrea's are his Lucretia; the distance between the Venus and the Virgin is but a

short slip to them. It depends on the soul of the painter to determine which it shall become."

"Raphael went over to Venus after he went to Rome, I believe," said Gertie. "I remember hearing he was said to like them better than his sacred ladies, after he became a personage. Oh, light-headed Raphael!"

It was with some difficulty that Mrs. Reynolds marched them by the many Peruginos that are Perugia's boast. They were not in a sight-seeing mood, and grumbled over her requirement as they loitered down to the cathedral outside the Etruscan gate. To Clare the portal of a cathedral was always a supernatural invitation. Within, however doubting or earth-bound her spirit, to her the sculptured marbles, the historic pictures, the lacy carvings and mystery of space and time, the dignity of supporting pillars, the wealth of pulpit and chapel, the thrill of the high altar spoke to her in the assuring words of the old hymn of her childhood, authoritative and final:

"Saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs,
Answer YES."

To-day a surprise was in store for her with the rest, for, behold, behind this high altar there is a door that lets the soul out upon the world as the dove from the ark, the heavenly heights and depths

mocking all interior wonders. The face of the Most High seemed shining down into their own. Blinded by the immortal morning moment, a sacrament of heaven and earth, they stood entranced until the restless sacristan closed the vision and led them back to grope their way through the dim church that symbolised the tangible body of the spiritual faith.

They were very quiet as the carriage pitched down under the wall to the convent of Monte Luce. From this point one commands the best idea of the old road around the city, whose gates are still the feature of Perugia and joy of the Perugians.

“Don’t make us go inside!” pleaded Gertie, as the driver stopped at the doorway of the convent, a door in a wall beneath a tiny shrine and rusty bell. It was no use to urge them. Mrs. Reynolds foresaw all sorts of blasphemous pranks if Lloyd and Gertie were coerced within Catholic precincts against their will, so, yielding to the glamour of the morning, they drove on around the city on the outside, the road a mere ledge against the ramparts. The sun was warming to noontide, and the gusty threatening showers threw cloudy enchantments at intervals over the responsive fields below. Gertie stood up in the carriage and stretched her arms wide, like wings, crying:

“ Now I know why the eagle loves the eyrie best ! ”

Clare's face was turned away, but there were tears in her eyes, her mother was sure. To her Umbria was always tinged with sadness ; its silence was that of the long afterward and its ever-lengthening shadows. Even the spring here lacked its madrigal lilt.

The Porta Susanna, bearing its armorial design, blue with a chain, is the sunset gate of Perugia, fronting the westward. It was destined to hear strange tongues that afternoon, unlike the usual jargon of quarrelling peasants or passing salutations. Mrs. Reynolds turned her steps thither after several hours employed to her own liking, for sake of the sunset colour—to watch the glory gather and be alone. The echo of the bugles was dying away from the military parade ground on the terrace lower down, the soldiers returning to their barracks in a line of living colour under the slanting sorcery of the sun's late rays. She watched their sinuous retreat with pleasure in their rhythm ; the throb of their marching feet held a thrill no inanimate music could rival. She had come there for peace to-day ; these moving troops made her think of Napoleon's fallen heroes of Austerlitz. Would it be required of her, as of them, to rise and fight again ? She had

new anxieties concerning Clare. Events were not progressing to her satisfaction. The ill and dying seldom suffer as the watchful heart that stands beside them in full vitality, bearing the double torment of pain and helplessness. Sometimes the mother felt her heart quail before her responsibility, but never did her brave smile falter or her spirit flag before those dear eyes that equally braved out the days to avoid the despair of a mutual betrayal of unhappiness.

At the sunset gate one should find mellow reflection, tranquillity. Life with its teasing, old mortalities was not enough to-day; she needed new inspiration. Full of her meditations, she had walked around the path under the old wall, the sole remaining witness of the Etruscans at Perugia, leaving the labyrinths of the town by the Porta Eburnea, stopping to sketch its pilgrim's staff which is still visible on a green ground, and was about to enter again by the Porta Susanna and assemble her young people for their return. It was a sheltered lane for a ramble. The lizards bask there even in the sun of January, and the little wind-sown wild blooms that delight in the crevice of the wall and along the footway are never wholly wanting at any season. Sweet alyssum clings and runs, twines and hangs, and the trees, when in their blooming, lift their cor-

onals to trace a sylvan arabesque against a background of mediæval rampart.

From the distant parade ground came a last flare of the bugle, where modern warfare moved on in the hostile steps of the grim battles of centuries. Mrs. Reynolds had leaned over the wall to gather a handful of the sweet wildings, and did not at first see the priest, who seemed to have been standing at the opposite corner of the gate for an indefinite time, looking off toward the sunset.

How much he must know of this wonderful city! She turned to him from the gorgeous masquerade in the west, watching the reflection on his face.

"Dying they salute each other, these two majesties, the one immortal, the other mediæval," she said. "Perugia, Day salutes thee!"

"The sun saw Perugia in her grandeur before her walls were crumbled or the Popes departed," continued the priest.

"And you have seen all the monuments of antiquity, the Orient, Greece and Rome,—but what of the new world toward which the sun is turning even now? What of our own America?" she asked.

"The past is over and done, what of the future

"Ah, yes, it is true," he said retrospective
"my path has led me through the Indian jur

and within the Turkish mosque. I have seen the Arab pray in the desert dawn when only Allah was near him. I have passed behind the veil of the holy of holies in the Jewish synagogue and stood where Paul the Apostle stood upon Mars hill, and in the most holy footsteps of our crucified Lord at Gethsemane. He maketh the sun to shine upon the believer and the heretic, the prodigal and the faithful alike; the future and the past are as one day to him." He was lost in his own reverie, resting his head on his hand as if searching the will of the Almighty in the sky. After a long silence he turned to her again, saying: "And you, madame, know the world widely; have been as I, a wanderer?"

"I have been a cosmopolitan of emotions," she replied thoughtfully. "Journeying rather in the deep places of experience; adventuring on the strange coasts of passions never wholly explored, but always finding a safe harbour in the love of husband and child. I have great cause to be grateful for my anchorage. I have been spared the perils of those who drift and doubt, having had always those to guide who depended on my love. Now that the sorrows of life have overtaken me, I am still necessary, perhaps even more necessary than if my child had been spared her bitter discipline."

They stood again silent, looking off over the pen-

sive valley that shone radiant in the melting flush of the west.

"Who could imagine the world was so soon to be left in darkness?"

"It is the darkness that broods the light," she replied, minded her.

"I must always remember that for courage almost seems more than religion times."

"It is religion," he said; "and remember that your sun will rise again also. The heathen never looked for the great gods till the halcyon days went. We may learn from the pagan, though we see clearer by the light of Calvary."

He was gentle in his dealing with this woman whose daughter he hoped to win, but with certain conviction that her religion and his could not mingle—nay, could scarcely make their phrases intelligible one to the other. Her mental powers were so clear the beautiful shadows of mystery were driven back, leaving the blessed mystery veiled, bereft of incense vapour or the flickering candle light. Her soul was an atmosphere of noon. He shrank from her unswerving sight which left so little hiding. She detected his reference to Clare now and met it frankly.

"Guided by that light, you would give my c

ter the painless death in life—renunciation, I suppose,”—she said. “I want her to live before she dies. I want her to have a tangible aim for living, to know the joy of love, the happiness of companionship, the intoxication of a sense of growing power.”

“Peace endures when joy has fled,” urged the priest gently. “The world cannot give peace. It is the ultimate great gift of the Master to his best beloved disciples.”

“She is too young for peace!” cried the mother. “Rather let her suffer that she may learn to endure; let her ripen, even if the frost and tempest threaten her.”

“Give me not peace, O God, until my spurs be won!
But let life come as He came, with a sword, nor cease
Till wounded I may stagger up and on—
Then knowing war, may pray for peace.”

The priest listened to the cadence of her voice with evident pleasure.

“If the blade of life destroy her?” he questioned.

“I am waiting and watching; the day will come when health and youth will assert themselves and she will divorce her past and open her heart to a future full of hope.”

Did he start ever so slightly at that careless use of the word divorce? In his soul, maybe, but not to the scrutiny of the woman by his side.

"It is nature," she added in a final tone, turning as if to go.

"Nature wounds, religion consoles; she has herself admitted as much," he said quietly.

"If it does console——"

"Its consolation is the highest office of the church," he reminded her. "It is the first duty of a mortal to seek such consolation."

"That is one of the points of divergence between a religion of observance to rule and one of free conviction, catholic and orthodox," she said.

"The catholic seeks the sorrowing, it does not wait to be sought by an act of free will. It unites the estranged, it wins the sinner, it forgives as it hopes to be forgiven. May it unite these souls life and error have put asunder!"

A beautiful hope shone from his dark eyes where prayer seemed a constant office. Mrs. Reynolds shivered as if the night had suddenly fallen over her, and moved a few steps toward the gate.

"Never pray that prayer!" she entreated. "Pray rather that a marriage like hers may be forgiven her

as a blasphemy against the light—— You cannot understand how I feel, you cannot understand——”

“A sacrament could never be a blasphemy!” His voice was hard now and disapproving. “You are asking me to sanction a loosing of the bonds the church in her infinite wisdom has irrevocably blessed. A sacrament is eternal.”

“Divorce ought to be a sacrament in some cases. What man has joined in ignorance, God ought to put asunder in mercy! You are a priest. I am her mother. The Lord who calls himself her Father in Heaven must love her more than I, and to his care we must entrust her.”

To a priest there is always a mystery in human love whose power he can only surmise. She had spoken with such faith and sweetness that even her words of sacrilege could not anger him against her.

“There is the risk, the awful risk——” he began hesitatingly.

“While there is life there is always risk, or one might say while there is risk there is life. Call it faith to dignify it, and it becomes a virtue if nobly sustained. I have confidence in my child and the One who made her; she was not designed for blight. She shall survive and bless her restoration!” She approached him a step or two nearer and putting

out her hand said wistfully: "We shall all reach the same sunset gate in the end, though each of us chose a different path."

"If you are going back to Assisi by carriage to-night," began the Father, disregarding the outstretched hand as he glanced at the shadows so swiftly increasing on the plain, "you should not linger. I too must continue on my way, having duties that will detain me in Perugia a few days before I am free to resume my writing."

He turned once more to the sunset, as if to seal some impression on his heart forever, just as Lloyd's modern outline presented itself from within and a child in some peasant's arms below began to scream as if to shatter whatever spell the hour had cast over them.

"That child screams for her whole sex!" said Lloyd. "No one baby could have accumulated wrongs enough to protest like that."

At his words they turned completely away, leaving the horizon in its deepening waves of oleander and daffodil that would soon burn to the fires of afterglow. The woman felt she had recognised an adversary, albeit a tender one, in this dark-robed priest. The priest for the first time knew the depth of a woman's courage, the height of a woman's faith. It would not be easy to subdue

spirits like these daring Americans, but the victories of the church are many; her arms are open wide by night and day. Their parting was one of formality tinged with an increase of mutual respect.

Lloyd watched the stately retreat of the towering form with frank curiosity.

"A fine fellow, barring his petticoats," he admitted. "Worrying you to let Clare make a nun of herself, I suppose."

"On the contrary, to be united with her husband," said Mrs. Reynolds, too stirred to keep her own counsel. He put up his hand as to ward off a blow.

"The brute! Is there no decency over here, even among the clergy? Not even a sense of fair play?"

Mrs. Reynolds sighed.

"Clare will marry again," he asserted stoutly; "but not Variani."

"If she were to meet a real man,—perhaps, if he is capable of the self-restraint that shall prove him a friend; but if he turns passionate of a sudden and shows the mark of the brute,—never. Perhaps it is a wicked risk I am letting her run, perhaps Father Benardino is right and wiser than I, in my blindness of love for my child."

"She will marry," asserted Lloyd again, posi-

tively. "Her own babies will distract her from all these memories."

Mrs. Reynolds groaned.

"Will no man ever be convinced that babies are not the antidote for every broken heart?" groaned the woman.

"It is the law of feminine nature."

"It is feminine, but not universal——"

"Clare is a woman, and a true woman," said Lloyd obstinately. Again the peasant infant lifted its yell upon the liquid air. Lloyd laughed aloud. "Life is life and woman is woman; you'll see for yourself," he prophesied.

"I just declared to Father Benardino that while there's risk there's life," she replied.

"Granted; I suppose a mummy, for example, has no dread of probabilities,—even the Umbrian weather." He was still smiling as he knocked his pipe out against the famous gate. "After all your speculations, woman is woman and man is man; you will see."

They walked back swiftly, for the night was indeed falling on the valley, and not until they began to climb the stairway leading to the Brufani terrace was their silence broken. Just as the sun threw them a last signal, she stopped, ostensibly to get her breath.

"Do you believe in hell?" she asked him suddenly.

"No; I hope, in hell," said Lloyd slowly.

Their eyes met and flashed in mutual understanding. It would be priest against mother, church against lover then. Which would prevail?

CHAPTER VIII

A PEASANT WOOING

EVEN the spring is chastened in its coming at Assisi, returning with a gentle loveliness like the benediction rather than the exuberance of bursting splendour, as in the New England climate, where it seems tearing itself from the hold of dreary winter to flaunt escape in the captor's face.

The shadow of the budding grape leaves threw their transient tracery over the arbour floor, and shadowy as their promise of purple fruit and vintage were the whispers of Biancha and Beppo. One heard them rising from the garden as they tended the juicy stalks of the young vegetables to stalwart maturity; or by the well that was really a fountain, in the courtyard. There they often lingered over the cool task of water drawing until Beppo would have fallen in from long gazing at Biancha's image on the untroubled water, save that her laughter recalled him and the pleasure of hastily encircling her round young waist with his swarthy arm, to prevent such a catastrophe. They were training the

the vines to run toward the top of the pergola and Biancha thought it much like teaching a vine to creep, as she lured the fragile tendrils from trellis to trellis in the morning sunshine. The priest was walking up and down in his interminable fashion, seeing nothing outside his own thoughts, and Clare on the balcony above was at last equally interminable doing nothing.

"He looks at her as he looks at a shrine," whispered Beppo; for it is wise to be discreet, and the fathers hear more than less instructed persons might believe, even when they read as they walk, as all good Italians have cause to do.

"He looks not at all at her," dissented Biancha, "but he looks at her as he looks at a shrine."

"But he sees without looking," protested Beppo. "He sees only his prayers, and looks never," dissented Biancha.

"When it is love, it does not need to look often." So he looked down as if to penetrate the very heart of the grape, while his colour mounted as high as the red Chianti could lift it on a *festa*. Biancha gurgled in response. It was not a laugh, but a gurgle such as happy brooks give in the springtime.

"He only looks at Our Lady of Sorrows," she

the old ambitions? Her music, her writing, that had promised so richly? She had loved the wet clay too at one period not far behind, what of her modelling? Vanished with that dream of a career that to her friends had seemed her destiny from her cradle?

Now, only the church music moved her; she neither read nor wrote, nor even remembered her gifts lying rusty in her possession. Gertie came up behind her silently and, in one of her rare moods of expressive tenderness, laid her hand lightly on the burnished hair that shone so in the unhindered light.

“Don’t, Clare dear,” she said.

“Why, I am not doing anything,” smiled Clare.

“That is what I meant, don’t, don’t do anything! Come away from shadowland and sculp or write or—— Oh, I can’t bear it, to see you sit blind-eyed another day! It is creeping, creeping like malaria over the campagna after dusk; it will bring visions or fevers or both, and no one will fight it away from you until it is too late!”

Clare made a little impassive motion of indifference.

“I am not creative,” Gertie went on; “I can only appreciate, but you could do the things that are worth while if you only would—and here you

sit day after day losing all your spirit and breaking all our hearts."

She was relieved when Clare replied as naturally as if this infringement upon her reserve was a usual occurrence and not calculated to earn resentment for its intrusion.

"Well, what would you suggest for me to do?" she asked wearily.

"Sculp!" cried Gertie eagerly. "The clay could get here from Rome in a few hours."

Clare's smile was sceptical, as if she was smiling at her own past self—another person.

"I began to model an altar once, representing the struggle between art and religion. I might have done it then,—it was not very badly begun. Art so beautiful and religion so austere, yet trying to reveal her love for art with arms open wide to take her to her heart, that reconciled they might prevail over the whole world. Sometimes I feel it would have been great to have realised those old dreams, but I have no faith in myself any more, my universe has swung off its orbit, and, Oh, Gertie dear, when a woman loses faith in herself she loses everything. It is the supreme cruelty, and death is so slow to hear!" She was near to tears, but controlled herself. "Father Bernardino says the church heals," she added softly.

"Clare, Clare, you are so young!" protested Gertie.

"The Virgin Mary took her vows at three."

The corners of Gertie's mouth twitched suspiciously.

"The church is a last resort for old men and old maids, not for young and beautiful and dearly beloved women," she said, with decision.

"Many a young and beautiful woman has found it truer to her than her lovers of her own choosing."

"Only those deadly Etruscan women!" scoffed Gertie.

"Read this prayer, it is the one of poor beautiful Mary Queen of Scots. Father Bernardino copied it for me," she said, opening the book in her lap.

Gertie took the prayer-book extended to her as if it had been a relic or a newborn baby or any other black magic, and read in the priest's exquisite handwriting the prayers of the condemned queen. Her mouth retained its peculiar twist as she did so; she had none of Clare's religious curiosity. A short cut to heaven left her time free for more congenial occupations, and her own Church of England afforded her all the satisfaction her devotional tendency demanded or would accept.

"Read it aloud," she said, handing it back; so Clare read in her half-husky voice the plaintive cry:

“ Domine Deus
Speravi in te.
Care me Jesu
Nunc libera me
In dura catena
In misera poena
Desidero te.
Languendo, gemendo
Adoro, imploro
Ut liberer me.’ ”

Gertie was thinking hard. For underneath the “*Mariae, Scotia Regina*” she had read Father Bernardino’s name written in the unworldly script of the priest. He had given Clare this breviary, and she had accepted it; it was worse than her darkest fears then; but aloud she evinced none of her inward trepidation, and only said with an imitation of Bianca’s shrug:

“ You can write a better prayer than that yourself.”

“ I might write a prayer—I did once, but it did not belong to any creed save that of pagan Pan. Nature comes closer than anything; but don’t worry about me, little cousin——”

“ Write a novel,” urged Gertie, renewing her attack on other lines. “ Put in all the people you have known—you have seen so much of the world and you understand men so well without half trying——”

“But men never act in a novel the way they do out of it!” exclaimed Clare.

“Then write an original novel, and make them as they are in real life. Write a story about the way women misconceive men, and call it ‘The men I have not met.’”

Clare laughed at her enthusiasm, but nothing daunted, Gertie continued to plead:

“You write differently from any of the younger set already, you are so much cleverer than any of them——”

“Just clever enough to appreciate the value of the advice of Alceste; you recall him in the ‘Misanthrope’? where he says satirically to his friend:

“‘*Quel besion si pressant avez vous de rimer?*’

and farther on:

“‘*Si l’on peut pardonner l’essor d’un mauvaise livre
Ce n’est qu’aux malheureux qui composent pour vivre!*’

and since I need not compose to live——”

“Why not live to compose?” cried Gertie. “I should not dare recite Molière here, it sounds like profanity,” she added, looking over her shoulder apprehensively. Then she began again, not to be distracted from her purpose of arousing Clare: “You have such insight,—have felt so much——”

Clare drew her cousin's hand down to her own soft cheek.

"I know so few emotions, Gertie *mia*; jealousy, loneliness, the motives that lead people to love and live apart; but of fulfilment, of joy—what do I know? I should write a novel so fatally true that people would dismiss it as unnecessarily sad and morbid."

"But you could avoid that, you have been taught how to write; you must have learned how to use your material in your classes."

"My classes taught me nothing; women are not taught to work or to pray honestly. They grow up and a nebulous mass of possibility hangs over them until they marry. The sphinx is a woman—her destiny is still awaiting solution. If God was a woman he would not permit many things as they are——"

A long whistle told Gertie that Lloyd was getting tired of waiting for her to practise "putting" on the upper Piazza, and she caught up her golf clubs, hoping against hope that she had made some impression in spite of Alceste. Clare did not show Gertie the prayer she had written before her marriage, but its form came back to her now as she closed her eyes after she was left alone again with

the morning, and she repeated it mentally, pondering a phrase now and then as if testing its veracity.

“Thou who permittest us to live here a little while that through coming into being we may form a conception of Thee, as a shadow crossing our soul,—we thank Thee that we are mortal a sufficient time to find each the kindred soul of our own. And that thus knowing Thee we may also conceive Thee through the manifestation of Thyself in Nature, and having passed through mortality we may enter upon eternity together.

“God of the changing year, we bless Thee!

“God of the sea, we marvel at Thee!

“God of the moon and stars, we adore Thee!

“God of the love of man and woman, we keep silence before Thee.

“Thou who hast removed the loneliness of the unborn, and the dread of extinction,

“We worship Thee!”

Her eyes brimmed over; how she had loved the beauty of life and her lover's consummation of it! Alas that man should overturn both God and self in a defenceless soul's confusion of agony.

Biancha and Beppo had finished their task in the pergola and were now loading the donkey cart with ruffled cabbages. The Swiss *concierge* who had supplanted Lloyd's comrade came out to ask her if there were any commissions for Perugia, his blonde face as much astray among these dusky

inhabitants as one of his own Alpine edelweiss. He watched the chattering pair as he waited, with evident disapproval, though Biancha on a load of cabbages, green as sun and rain could tint them, would have inflamed a Southern heart of stone.

"How the Italians are a foolish race!" he grumbled, looking back at them. "He is no better than all the rest of them. He will be but poor ever; give him but five cents and he goes to the pleasure! Even as does the frivolous Sienese."

"Pleasure for five cents is not so dear," said Clare, overhearing his soliloquy. "It sounds tempting; where can one find it?"

The Swiss scowled. "Not for Madame, naturally, but where wine and cards are ready—aye, and——"

"When he is married he will be obliged to save; his fun will be over soon enough," she suggested.

"They will marry poor," insisted the Swiss; "if they marry?" he added doubtfully. "But the boy is of the Perugians, and the Perugian is never so greedy to marry a wife as to stab an enemy, or a mistress, for that matter: '*E verro*' you shall see." he muttered in his German Italian. "The stiletto is more for her——"

"I expect they will marry before I go away from Assisi," said Clare, surprised.

"She will not marry," he reasserted, folding his

arms; "her mother was dead, young and even handsomer than she. The flowers that bloom, die; she will fall early, like this."

He picked up an oleander blossom from the floor and snapped it from his fingers over the balustrade, then hurried away, leaving her to envy the peasant girl who could love and mate simply as the birds of the air, and drown or stab herself, if betrayed.

Normal, elemental emotion stirred within her: close to that of the simple animals and in harmony with the thrilling purpose of Nature working through earth and instinct and manifold mystery, to attain creation's ultimate best. Sometimes the natural desire of love swept over her, racked her, remorseless, left her pale and spent. The warmth and beauty of the spring, love's ally,—other men and women gazing in each other's eyes to find an enchanted garden there,—nay, the very birds that were nesting under the convent eaves in disregard of all monastic propriety, protested against her loneliness, cried out for mating!

Lloyd's voice sent a shiver through her, a shiver of reality; then came the bitter, intruding element of man's lower nature. She shrank from her own pitiful knowledge of the disillusion of love, and resolved to give Biancha a candle apiece for all the saints on her name-day, to avert sinister interfer-

ence in her affairs of the heart. Perhaps faith in a superstition might work its own cure. If Beppo knew the protecting saints were invoked, that alarming certainty might in itself have power to cool the brutality of his peasant passions, and restrain Biancha that she should walk more circumspectly than her dead *madre* before her toward the respectable shelter of a husband's arms.

She was a picture as she set off to-day behind the mouse-coloured donkey, with its wise brown eyes. Gertie flew for her camera and snapped her on the spot, cabbages and all, with Beppo near, showing all his white teeth in typical fashion, indicating his raptures of delight. "Why should Biancha not become a postal card?" Fame could offer his rustic imaginings no higher pinnacle. Ah, to what strange uses the trifling bit of print was to be put in the hovering future, wherein Fate was already sorting her chances; little they guessed as they watched the cart grow less and less upon the winding road toward the village of Santa Maria on the plain.

Beppo alone remained motionless at his point of observation after the others had gone away. The market days that brought separation like this were very long to him. Usually Biancha set off at the break of day, and to work through the empty mo

without her tantalising presence was like toiling in a vineyard at noonday when others slept; so long as a true son of Italy, he drowned the hours by wasting them away in sultry *siestas*, as best he could and as far as that was consistent with the exigencies of varied duties energetically pointed out to him by his unrestful Padrona. His dreams were of Biancha; his honest dreams that went to his fevered head more than the liquor he sometimes drew from the glasses left undrained by the revellers who lunched or dined at the Evasio and left a swallow behind them—for luck, perhaps, he could not supply any other reason. His reveries ran ever in the same road—a room, a goat, later a saddle, perhaps a donkey. Not an elaborate heaven, always aflame with the carnation of Biancha's cheeks and the dazzling hope of her possession. And while he lay unsheltered from the sun that warmed fruit and men alike, hour by hour, Biancha thinking her own thoughts of him,—at least she thought so until other carts far ahead on the highway urged her to hurry the little donkey till his feet were red like twinkling spindles, and other eyes near the market place began to be bent admiringly on her glowing face and mellowing curves. It was Clare who thought seriously of the young man all day, long after Biancha had turned her

heart full toward the excitement of market day. Beppo slumbered too deep to dream. She applied to Father Benardino on her first opportunity to detain him, but found him immovably reticent to the results of his contemplation of peasant love and marriage. She would have liked him to discuss the worthiness and meaning of such mating, but the contrast of such with more subtle natures under the same spell of possession had a strangely keener interest for her, painful as powerful. It might have been the unrecognised longing to speak to that part of her own life she had forever committed to silence, or the persuasive charm of all the power of the heart over women or a mere rousing of the dominant forces within her at the touch of the romance that had stirred her so unusually.

But if the priest had known with Balzac that "talking of love is to make love," he could not have put the whole subject aside with more finality than he was doing. He was saying gravely: "The church chastens the lusts of the flesh according to its own authority." Nor could he intend to be drawn into any discussion of the merits or the varied guise under which it is presented. The church has less to boast in its conflict with the world perhaps than in all others. To-day, divine law in its austerity seemed alone to exist for him; and when he was carried, for the afternoon was passing fair a

balcony deserted, the others making ready for their walk to the Carceri to see the sun go down and drink their tea in the open air.

"You are not going with them? Will you not be too solitary, too lonely in their absence?" he inquired of her wonderingly.

"A child of Nature can never be lonely." She indicated the whole sky and valley with a sweep of her hand. "Nature is everywhere."

"As God and his blessed angels are everywhere," he responded, raising his eyes to the cathedral. They were eyes full of ardour, eyes that saw not so much with the trance of visions as in the light of truth.

"Father Benardino, the church satisfies you?" she began wistfully.

"It redeems all," he assured her.

"And this church here," she said reverently, "is hallowed beyond any I have ever known. It is like a soul, it seems to me, a sublime ideal, wrought out in faith, transfigured in prayer."

"It is the outward sign of the ideal," he assented.

"Will you let me tell you my ideal of a sanctuary? As it was," she amended.

"As it still is?" his heart prompted, but he made no betraying sign of his eagerness.

"I used to dream of a temple built with the classic outline of the Greeks; in it there was one window only, toward heaven; and no foot but mine ever entered there. White flowers never were to fade upon the altar, and on one night of every month I would kneel there in silence until the full moon stooped from heaven and touched the flowers—then it would have happened, and I should go breathlessly away."

"What would have happened, my child?"

"The blessing, the high communion with Nature and her unknown God."

The soul of the priest exulted. How brief the interval between such a ritual, even of a professedly pagan creed, and the mystery of the Actual Presence! In a brief vision he saw her head shorn of its worldly glory and the upturned face beneath the white folds of a novitiate's veil. Recovering himself instantly, the words of the marriage sacrament returned to him. She was the wife of a living man. As such the church, but not the cloister, must win her, nor stain her religious profession by disregard of earthly vows. The vision the Tempter had cast before him to ensnare his zeal was no less evil than the contemplation of an uncowed priest. Whence came such weakness? He was so absorbed in his own self-reproach that he did not hear Lloyd's civil

question about the path to the Carceri, and walked briskly away without a smile or bow.

"Well, personally I could get along with John Baptist in society better than that man!"

Gertie gazed after him incredulously; it still was strange to her to be ignored.

"There was manna in the wilderness I had always inferred," said Lloyd drily. "And passion in desert," he added, under his breath. But he, too, refused to take Biancha's affairs seriously when the dangers besetting her beauty were submitted to him for deliberate consideration.

"She is following her destiny well enough," he said indifferently. "It will be the old song for her youth, beauty, marriage, soon a quorum."

"Next a quorum!" struck in Gertie.

"Then mass and work and work and mass, a more teeth gone every year, then a candle at hand and feet, and at last a corner in the Campo Santo with a rickety cross to mark it for a while."

Lloyd, that is only the skeleton," objected Mrs. Arnold. "You have left out all but the bare bones, as a scientist might! All the love and pain and sweetness——"

"And the drink and abuse and weariness! What is there for the workingman anyway! What is there for our own class?"

"Love is a tragedy of temperament," began Mrs. Reynolds, with a quick glance at Clare.

"And temperament is rarely found in peasants, thank God!" he ejaculated.

"It is the space between personalities that makes social relation absorbing and marriage so dangerous," continued Mrs. Reynolds. "Our reserves separate us far less, often, than our intimacies."

"Which means, Gertie," said Lloyd, "that when you marry, you are to take a man six sizes too large for you. He will shrink fast enough!" He turned abruptly to Clare.

"What did your friend Trilby say about his daughter's future?"

"Father Benardino does not wear sandals, as you know, and he does not talk of Biancha with me; he seems to put all profane subjects far from him."

"To the pure all are impure, of course!" cried Gertie vindictively. She had a grudge against the priest. She had cast it upon the waters, and it would come back to her paid, she was sure.

"It is permitted him to watch over her soul, of course, but to contemplate youth and folly is not the occupation of a priest," retorted Clare.

"Girls like Biancha have senses and hearts, not souls," declared Lloyd.

"I wonder if a man ever fell in love with a soul?" Gertie propounded.

Lloyd pondered before he answered:

"Not with the soul surely, but with lesser things nearer his own level that owe their existence to the soul."

"That would depend on his own degree of spirituality, would it not?" asked Mrs. Reynolds. "How many men do any of us count among our friends who are in the least degree spiritual? They are artistic, sympathetic, æsthetic often, many shades of emotional capacity are theirs,—but are they spiritual? Hardly."

"And women are all spirit——" began Clare.

"Men are animals, fierce to protect, brave to endure," said Lloyd.

"Men are honest, full of courageous loyalty—but spiritual? Rarely, unless they are of the priesthood."

"A priest is not a man," objected Lloyd.

"Father Benardino is, and a saint beside," said Clare, cutting him short.

"I have never known any saints except those of Summerfield," he said musingly. "They seemed rather to have had sainthood thrust upon them from necessity, and looked as if they found it a sourly unsatisfactory business."

"How I hate a cussed saint!" cried Gertie.

"Your splenary inspiration would make the Old Testament writers jealous, Gertie," he laughed.

"I shall love my love not for his spiritual qualities, but for his faults—I expect to be his worst one too," she predicted.

"Most women mistake loving the little faults of smoking and extravagance or flattery and easy optimism for a virtue of devotion; but how few really love a man through the real faults that are serious enough to push aside character and require the stern affection from which immortal quality is made!" Mrs. Reynolds spoke soberly indeed.

They remembered Clare, and all began to speak of other topics in trivial vein. She often felt herself a discord or limitation in their casual, wide-ranging discussions, and to-day she allowed herself to be carried off to the hillside with them in spite of her former determination to the contrary, being reluctant for the first time to remain alone with her questioning heart. Her mind no longer lay quiescent, safe under the overshadowing cathedral, calm in its impersonal contemplation of the spring-time world. Now she must think, and of what? The future? That was blank. Love? That for her was over. Biancha? That led round to the



fretful love again. Father Benardino? She got up hastily.

"I am coming with you," she said. Could it be she was not so much tired of her own thoughts as afraid of them?

It was more than nineteen o'clock by the exaggerating Italian reckoning, and deeply dusk, as the tired donkey toiled into view. Biancha was late home. She seemed as one who has "heard the white horsemen" or seen a waving shroud. Her fingers shook and her eyes were over-bright for the end of a dusty day.

"Next market day," he had told her. Oh, such a handsome signor! And one who loved all good girls, if only their faces were pretty as hers. Such gold he had offered her too,—for mere kisses! *E verro*, kisses of a maiden betrothed belong to her *sposo*, but, *Dio mio!* kisses on such red lips are so plenty—and gold so scarce.

How it would be easy now to buy the coral earrings so long desired, and even the new bodice for the marriage too! No doubt it would cost many kisses, but such wages were only less delightful than the task that earned them.

Beppo standing in the doorway where he could watch her about her work, feasted his hungry brown eyes on her every movement.

"There is no one who dances the Tarantula as Biancha even but walks without music!" he cried, as she flew across the courtyard on some errand to the fountain.

"Who would crawl as a blind beggar who had lost his dog?" she retorted over her shoulder. She soon reappeared again at the window, a plate of lettuce twirling above her head with the practised motion of a tambourine player. She smiled at him broadly, then ran away laughing. He waited, besotted by her, for another chance. No one danced as Biancha did. His blood slowed and quickened alternately at the recollection. Others said so; he hated them for saying it now. He hated the eyes of all who saw her, from the *concierge* to the youngest priest. It had been rarely enough she and he had a chance for their pleasure, but the Pardon was coming, the May Pardon at least, and they would dance together. He half shut his eyes now in an ecstasy of anticipation.

A secular trance it was, Biancha's saucy face surrounded with flying ribbons, shaking her tambourine an inch from his nose, then circling madly within his arms, from which embrace she tore herself to join the lines of girls and gallants should to shoulder, who faster and faster followed

delirious music of the throbbing guitars and nervous mandolins.

Poor Beppo, inflamed by a poison more insidious than the tarantula's bite, felt the pleasure leap and sting within his veins for mere remembrance. "*Subito! Subito!*" his desire cried within, "*Corpo di Bacco! Subito!*"

"She had better look out for him!" warned Lloyd, as he watched the little scene from the dining-room window. "He would stab. He is one of those indolent, burning things that once aroused become demoniacal."

"Why, she is his *addorata!*" protested Gertie, flying to the window as she spoke.

"All the more, let her take care!"

CHAPTER IX

WHITE OXEN AND MAY BLOOM

I SHALL wear it at the Pardon!" screamed Biancha. She had been so quiet of late that a return of her gay blushes was a thing refreshing to behold. Always so demure in the presence of her "white Signora," as she called Clare, what could have driven her worshipful manner thus wide of her custom? How those "beauty-haunted" painters of the earlier Italy would have been distracted by the tableau they made as they stood there! Clare, in her white unearthliness haloed by her wonderful, burnished hair, held a rosary in her extended hand. Biancha in her riper beauty of the flesh dropping on one knee to receive it.

"It came from Rome, the Holy City," said Clare, "where the Holy Father lives in his palace."

Biancha's eyes became round with wonder as she took the precious talisman.

"The Signora has been at some time, in Rome?" Her eagerness increased.

"Not once, but many times, Biancha."

The peasant girl's bodice rose and fell with visibly quickened palpitation.

"The Signora has heard sometimes of the Holy Father, at Rome?"

"The Pope, you mean? Why, yes, Biancha, I have seen him." Another startled stare from the awe-struck peasant. At last she spoke, timidly, as if frightened at her own audacity:

"The Signora is so good, too good; perhaps if she had still some tiny fragment of the skirt she wore at that time, she would give to Biancha one little scrap, *piccola, piccola*." She pinched her thumb and finger together to show how minute it need be, and stopped confused by her excitement, yet bold by force of her longing.

"The Pope blessed this very rosary. I had it in my haud with some others for that purpose, to have it blessed," said Clare. "Won't that be as well as the other?"

Biancha was on her feet with the spring of a young gazelle from the ferns, flung her head back and taking the graceful posture of the opening movement of the dance that had won her the fame of the prettiest dancer in the Umbrian Pardons, she held the sacred trophy high above, feasting her sparkling eyes upon the beads, turning and retreating, gliding and whirling, to finish with a final

sweeping salute to an imaginary partner, as she cried: "Then it's an indulgence! An indulgence!" Her voice rose higher and higher in its exultant repetition till it was almost a scream.

Clare looked on amazed as Biancha dropped once more on her knees to kiss her hand, promising incoherently to say a chant for the Signora every *Ave* of her life, for this.

The others had caught the significance of the scene from afar, and hastily joined them.

"What would your priest say to that?" demanded Gertie.

"What could that innocent child have had on her mind to make her act like that at the hope of indulgence?" agreed Mrs. Reynolds.

"The church is pretty hard on them sometimes," said Clare, "magnifying some trifling omission in order to inculcate the habit of obedience, and terrifying them beyond their actual deserts by the fear of hell."

"Now what has she done?" clamoured Gertie, alert for discoveries. "That is what I want to know!"

"What is she going to do? That is the question," said Lloyd, with lifted eyebrows.

"Do you think she is going to seize this opportunity to go and sin some more—as the Bible says?"

queried Gertie. "How, in this priest-ridden country?"

"I don't seem to remember your Bible selections always, Gertie," he replied; "but you have got my general idea."

"It must be terrible to live under a continual apprehension of hell every time you want to sin one little inconspicuous, insignificant no-account sin!"

Gertie shivered. Mrs. Reynolds shook her head reprovingly.

"Sin has not any size, Gertie; it is without form and void; but it can crush and destroy by its minuteness with the same certainty as——"

"Don't go on!" said Gertie, kissing her to stop the argument; "I have not had a chance to sin, and can't hope to have one probably for weeks to come. I couldn't hunt up a temptation here if I had tried, and it would turn into a shiving if I did! The apostle must have had Assisi in mind when he said: 'Count it all joy if ye fall into divers temptations'!"

"If you wanted to do something that was wrong, that you knew was a sin, would you do it, or would the Catholic's fear of hell restrain you?" asked Clare intently.

"The only hell is fear of hell, my darling, I

believe." Her mother was a student of higher criticism as well as Father Benardino.

"Not to a good Catholic," dissented Clare.

"Do you suppose it really keeps them from sin if they want to do anything badly enough?" insisted Gertie. "Do let us talk about sin, it is so exciting in Assisi. You begin, Lloyd. What would you do if you terribly wanted something that the restriction of the church forbade?"

"If it was a case of paradise now against heaven hereafter?" he qualified, as if considering.

Gertie nodded.

"Well, I should consider a heaven in the hand worth two hells in the bush," he answered readily, without glancing toward Clare.

They were discussing indulgences for days after—that phase of the church practice which it is so difficult for the Protestant to understand or value. Penance they concluded to be helpful; a natural effort to cleanse the heart and atone for evil done. Forgiveness they conceded must always be, while life existed; but indulgence——

"It supports their whole system," Lloyd would insist obstinately. "You can buy a right to any of your pet sins as long as your lira hold out."

"It is something for the uneducated to be obliged to sacrifice their lira for their own weakness and

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s gratification," said Mrs. Reynolds. "And it more for them to feel their souls absolutely directed by a spiritual father. What a relief to now where one stands with one's soul! Suspense over one's own misdoing has a more disquieting salvation; but Italy without her reign of fear, what would she be?" She shook her head.

They lay in wait for Father Benardino one day and listened reverently to his story of the Pardon of Assisi, the famous indulgence granted to St. Francis of old, making them feel in spite of their prejudice, the superiority of a sensitive soul that leads its own evil tendency, over that of one securely intrenched in its own stolidity. He showed them, too, how Catholic wisdom guards the soul against surprise; how even degradation may be met to earn its own remission of sins by simple acts humbly repeated; how the unspeakable scheme of eternal salvation may be brought down to simple terms comprehensible to those little gifted above their own gentle animals, with which so great a part of their daily life is passed; how, in short, indulgence cheered the despairing of all classes and illumined the sanctified, in whose holy reckoning one prayer omitted was defilement; one erring thought the path to purgatory.

"It was to St. Francis the transfiguration of his

hope to heavenly reality, when the Pope Pius Honorious, then at Perugia, granted him this supreme favour; not for himself, ah no! but for all others," said the priest devoutly.

The story was familiar to them all. How St. Francis, inspired by a visitation of Christ and Mary as he prayed, begged for indulgence for all who entered the Portiuncula upon a certain day. And how Christ, moved by the prayer of the Saint, though realising the magnitude of his request, instructed him to demand the same of the Vicar upon earth in His own holy name. Loudly the Pope murmured at first, but finally inquired: "For how many years is this indulgence besought—for one, or two? or perchance you wish even seven?"

"Father Benardino's own voice broke as he repeated in his native Tuscan the cry of St. Francis in reply: "*O Messer Il Papa! Perchè parli di anni e tempo? Io non ti chieggo anni mati chieggo anime!*" ("O holy Father, why speakest thou to me of years and time? I ask thee not for years, but souls!")

"How I should love to see it!" whispered Clare.

"The great Pardon of Assisi does not occur till midsummer," said Father Benardino calmly, as if the words held no intenser value than their information.

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"How long does it last?" Gertie's manner betrayed impatience. Midsummer, she thought; oh, rawling, stagnating suggestion! Midsummer! And now it was only May! She did not heed his answer.

"There is the fair and the feast, drawing pilgrims and merrymakers alike from the hills and valleys through the hot yellow dust, when Umbria lies scorching in the long rays of the August sun and the cicada waits until evening to shrill his satisfaction." Gertie sighed heavily and he added gravely: "Much has added itself to the original ceremony, St. Francis' idea of indulgence was not to make sin feasible, but redemption possible—and Paradise the end for all."

The great Pardon, as every traveller knows, is the event of the Umbrian year. At that time Assisi is thronging with peasants wearing their brilliant costumes, and sombre pilgrims who camp in the squares, in the Basilica, or sleep in gipsy fashion in the lanes, on their way to the Seraphic City. Whole families stray about the town staring at the shrines and paintings or testing the efficacy of the wonder-working relics. Strange and cruel penance is performed here voluntarily by the peasants, in full faith of utter absolution. Tormented consciences find peace thereby, until on the last

day, when the indulgence is actually granted, the intensity of prevailing excitement grows almost beyond all control. The moans and shrieks of the penitents have ceased when the multitude surges into the dim church from the oppressive heat and glare without, pressing madly toward the altar. After the priest has raised the relic and disappeared, the riot begins again. Around and around the altar, through the chapel and out, then in again, shouting, running, jostling, they go, each entrance counting for a new plenary indulgence.

The steps of the altar twinkle with coins of copper and silver. As long as the hours last, the interminable, inconceivable procession winds in and out, lifted above pain or hunger, thirst or weariness! "Crazed in the frantic joy of paradise"!—slender girls weak from self-chastisement, heavy women whose laborious lives should exempt them from such pains, youths caught in the terror of judgment to come, old men swept off their tottering feet by the onrushing stream that bore them on and on. This was the manner of the great Pardon by which Assisi, and indeed all Umbria, made its calendar.

"She is dead ten Pardons since," says the husband of his wife, sighing perfunctorily. And another reminds: "Her saint's day will be a month

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the Pardon;" or yet another: "It was two
years since—that the cabbages failed for lack of
rain and the goats ran hungry from the hills to
the streets to steal."

And now Biancha was pouting that they would
miss the Pardon, and so would miss the great
dance of the year. She would have danced for
them. No one had ever seen her dance as
she would dance at that Pardon! In coral earrings
and a new silk kerchief around her neck, and
clothes such as no Pardon ever prayed for before!
It was partly to appease her disappointment that
she had promised to go down to the cattle fair
in the village of Santa Maria in the plain.

"Why should we not go, 'all five of us?" Mrs.
Clare had asked.

"All five?" Gertie's eyes brightened at the
suggestion of a stranger.

"If you are including Father Benardino, he
should not go to a Pardon as an outsider—even an
important one has a sacred character for him,"
said Clare, as if thinking aloud.

"Where do you get five?" repeated Lloyd idly.
"Why, Gertie and Clare and you and myself and
the weather!" she cried, laughing. "The
Pardon has an absorbing personality here; I al-
ways count it a companion in itself."

However beguiling their beauty, these were bearable days to Lloyd. Living beneath the same roof that sheltered the woman he loved, with growing rebellion; yet forced to make no sign. The brightly burned the fires of his imagination at her future. There was the existing husband whose legal claim remained indisputable; there was the defiant church; two facts across his path. Yet he held his own purpose before his eyes as rigorously as did Father Bernardino hold the cross. What seemed to make little if any progress of late. What progress could he expect to make? Some hours there had been when Clare seemed to vibrate with him and to enjoy his sturdy companionship. More often he was inevitably relegated to Gertie's society, which was spicy enough, but his present mood merely a hindrance to his desire.

Clare did not avoid him nor did she depend on him. She always knew when he was there and when he was not, and with that he had to be content. Meanwhile the deepening of her spiritual intimacy with the priest was no longer unappreciated. Her mind was returning hungrily to its normal activity, and seeing it the Jesuit gave her impressive histories of the church in wise selection, leaving out such lives of the saints as included the narratives of extreme personal suffering that m

wound her delicate sensitiveness, and slurring over for the present the features of Catholicism less calculated to win her mental consent. She no longer mused away the hours now over her books, but read with continuity and purpose, and when she lifted her eyes from time to time, it was to get the true perspective of her own inward vision on some new point of doctrine or devotion, rather than the beauty of the purple distances that spread their lure before her.

Conscious that the music and poetry of his religion would appeal to her in their own tongue more irresistibly than by any written guide, he carefully fed her intellect and trusted her emotional nature to find its own refreshment in the æsthetic perfection of the ceremonials of the church.

Theirs was a curious relation. Mutually bereft of the interest sex imparts to the intercourse of man and woman, they spoke and were together as disembodied spirits might speak, having nothing to feign or conceal in their untrammelled liberty of soul with soul. It was the repose Clare found in this lacking element that expanded her confidence in the priest until she had yielded to his inspiration more than she was aware, while on his side a woman could only be to him an opportunity for the lifting up of a soul. So he pursued his solemn

ends and imperceptibly impressed his will upon her. And all this time she was a woman quick to feel the variety of his culture, the extent of his travels, the force of his intellect, the surpassing tenderness of his nature, the sublimity of his ideal; all of which together weighed powerfully in her valuation of his convictions. Thereby moving her own.

And all this same time she was very young and fair; and Father Bernardino might have profited by a remembrance of Saint Anthony if his habit of thought had not prevented any deflection from his devout courses, however radiant the provocation. He had obeyed her and never spoken to her of her husband again, but she felt the pressure of his character and influence directed against her silence that seemed to hold a mighty force in its place without checking it forever.

The event of the May cattle fair interrupted the monotony of their external pursuits and interrupted her preoccupation. Clare was right in her supposition that Father Bernardino would be involved in the actual performance of the spectacle, for he was hearing confessions all day in place of the brother priest whose continued infirmities prevented him from his duties in connection with the fair and on a *festa* many confessionals must be given in absolution, since the Italian must confess

came hurrying to welcome the "*Forestieri*," proud in her coral earrings, the Roman rosary Clare had given her dangling from her waist, and led them away to mingle with the holiday seekers and other enticements of the fair, with its calm white cattle and fantastically dressed peasants. They passed from booth to booth among the shrill bargaining throng, where household utensils were exhibited and statuettes of the Madonna, rude charms to be worn against every imaginable and unimaginable evil, and everywhere waving and fluttering the gay kerchiefs and high coloured aprons that are the *contadina's* ambition.

Everyone was chattering, screaming, hawking; there was laughter and good nature on every side. When two farmers had gesticulated a trade in cattle to a consummation they would grip each other's hands as a sign of contract and wring them till they must have ached. The cattle remaining the only unperturbed spectators, chewing as unconcernedly as became the descendants of the Greek bulls of Clitumnus, pasturage of the cattle of the gods.

Gertie had bought one of the immense hats which are the farmer's pride and was wearing it on the back of her head; both girls had their hands full of trifles and scarlet kerchiefs hanging around their

shoulders. Suddenly as Gertie turned to Biancha to confirm the price of a string of glass beads, she missed her, but just then a boy jumped up from the grass and offered to dance for them for a *soldo*, and they forgot her in the fun of his antics.

It was not until Beppo came, cursing and flurried, to tell her that the real dancing was about to begin, and the figures were already forming, while he was searching in vain for his partner, that they thought of her again.

"That looks like Biancha," said Clare, "over there in the portico of the cathedral." But Beppo was already out of hearing. She turned to buy still more wilted flowers offered her by a shy child who held them up to her notice in her hot hand without daring to speak, but Gertie remained staring in the direction Beppo had taken. It was not Biancha at whom she gazed, but a retreating figure as markedly unlike the peasants as their own.

"What is it, Gertie?" asked Lloyd, noticing her interest. "A man you knew?"

She stepped a little apart, one side of the crowd that obstructed her vision.

"No, a man I did not know," she replied.

"A phenomenon at large!" he cried, and just then the guitars began to tune and thud and the mandolins to tinkle impatiently, and they were car-

ried along with the rest toward the opening where the dance was about to break into motion. Biancha was the last to take her place. The Tarantella she danced that day was as mad as the maddest spider could have inflamed.

He could not be her partner, the noble *Signor*, of course—she had not expected that, but he was here; he would see her in her triumph! He had come solely to see her! *Dio mio*, how life was red to-day! And how her heart was beating as if it must break! At nightfall, on the road above the bridge he would await her, he had a present for her. Ah, the stupid Beppo, he was useful now! He could help her show her steps as no other partner in Umbria!

She danced on and on, with her eyes always lifted toward the steps of the church as if only conscious of her audience in that one spot. Whatever her inspiration, Gertie immediately connected it in her own mind with that shadowed corner of the portico, just out of their own range of vision. Beppo might be in the seventh heaven, holding his sweetheart's warm body in his whirling arms as they flew, but he was far too simple to recognise that Biancha, though dancing with him, was dancing for another man.

Giving herself with half-closed eyes to the de-

lirium of her desire to arouse the passion of the *Signor nobile*, under the sway of her imperious senses. Clare turned away with a shiver of distaste.

“This is terrible! I can’t endure to see Biancha look like that and dance as she does now! What does it mean?”

Lloyd did not hear her. He was applauding with the rest; he would not have believed it of Biancha either.

“It is indulgence, I suppose,” he said later as his glance met hers. They stood alone now, for Gertie had edged her way along through the crowd far enough to recognise the stranger for whom Biancha was excelling herself. Only for a moment she was able to catch an unobstructed view of the portico, but she was sure that the figure she had noticed earlier in conversation with Biancha was identical with the one just retiring within the Duomo, throwing a kiss with each hand toward Biancha, as he turned and, lifting the heavy curtain, disappeared within the church. The dance was finished and the panting peasant girl turned her enamoured face toward reality, palpitant and trembling.

CHAPTER X

"SIN FOR A SEASON"

YES, I am going," nodded Gertie, with decision; "I am going to accept the Ishams' invitation and enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season! This Assisi has more resemblance to a novel of Henry James than is canny; adultery, murder, and sudden death may have happened before or be going to happen afterward, but in the story nothing happens, nothing! It is so psychological, it only hovers."

"My poor dear Gertie!" cried her aunt, and Clare patted her hand sympathetically.

"The outside of a copy of De Musset looks like an oath here," she continued. "When I eat I feel as if I was snatching at the sacrament. I shall intone every word I speak in a day or two more. I'd rather be a mendicant friar!" she concluded, extending her hand with a whining "*Una piccolo soldo per l'amor di Dio!*" then with a whimsical transformation: "*Un petit' baiser pour l'amour de moi!*"

"You would make a jolly friar," said Lloyd.

"It would be quite an adventure to start out together and outwit the community. You are an attractive child, Gertie, but be careful how you allow yourself to get too clever—you need caution there. Cleverness is so cheap nowadays, and to be brilliant is to be like unto a torchlight procession, which attracts the mob and leaves the darkness behind it more apparent."

Life did grow several shades more sombre without Gertie. They all missed her in their own individual ways and clung a trifle closer together in her absence. Lloyd was more often with Clare, but though she was always all his ideal demanded in gentle friendliness, he felt the distance she put between them, in every topic they discussed and every plan that arose for their casual amusement. His integrity could but command her, yet his heart went out to her beauty; he chafed over her unusual powers laid so hopelessly aside. The tenor of their way was dispiriting. He resisted the impulse to renew his outburst on the day of their visit to Santa Clara, and wondered if to that frailty her increasing reserve was due. The pain of his suspense was the only vital element in the dulness of the indolent days.

In vain did Biancha ogle the pale Paolo when he crossed the piazza on his way to or from the church,

raising his eyes but seldom from his clasped hands and never deigning her a glance.

"He ought to make a pilgrimage to our blessed Lady of Lourdes," she complained. "Perhaps for the sake of his golden voice she would make a miracle and open his two eyes! Truly he sees nothing now, and all his voice is spent in her service, with nothing to him of reward but the face of her image that smiles on him the same as on Beppo there, or the unbeliever also!"

Lloyd meditated upon her jargon a few minutes.

"You have reason, as the French put it, *Biancha*," he agreed. "To be a priest with a voice like that strangling in your throat would choke almost any fellow to death."

The peasant girl stared hard at him, her fingers twitching as if in doubt whether to make the sign of the cross or the gesture that averts the evil eye.

"The Signor then also found Paolo a beast to be so stupid?" She put her question hesitatingly, yet with Italian boldness.

Lloyd nodded an affirmative.

"In my country, in New York, they would give him gold enough for such a voice to plate over the tombs of all the saints and the walls of the crypt beside, Giotto and all."

She stared at him fixedly trying to understand.

"Poor Paolo! He is but a foolish *contadino!*" she signed pityingly. "Our Lady without doubt would like better a robe of pure gold than to hear him sing the office that any other may perform as well——"

"Do you think so? I am not so sure about that," said Lloyd. "If you had to sit perched on a pedestal all day long and all night long in that dark place among the tombs, I guess you would want a handsome fellow like Paolo to sing to you, part of the time, anyway."

Biancha gurgled her contagious gurgle. It was very wicked, of course, this *conversazione Americano*, but, *Dio mio!* how it was *dilêtavole!* Almost everything was very wicked that was so enjoyable, and an extra Ave or two would set her right with the saints before bedtime; anyway, a *passatempo* so *straordinario* was worth the risk! She would wait to hear his next remark.

"How would the Virgin's job please you, Biancha?" he asked next, smiling over her animated face that struggled so hard to understand.

"*Scusi, signor!*" she begged. The sentence was too much for her. He tried again more simply; a broad astonishment spread over her face.

"Me?" She shrugged her slow shrug. "No; it is not bread nor Chianti the Lady of Sorrows gets,

or figs that melt in the teeth, but prayers, eternal prayers, and incense, till it must be like living only on the sweet *confettura*."

"But the people would always be coming to worship you," urged Lloyd. "They would always adore you, and bring you the most beautiful of the flowers."

Biancha grew suddenly sad; she looked as if she might be on the verge of tears.

"But no lips of little children ever touch hers; no hand may dare to take her own. It is sad, too sad, to be Queen of Sorrows!" Her tears actually started in pity.

"Remember she is queen of heaven," he suggested.

"*Si, si, signor*. In heaven she is happy beyond all women since there all good children are hers after they die. But, ah! *non capisco*——" She broke off, "*Scusi!*" and the merits of a career of mariolotry were summarily dismissed.

Gertie went to Perugia for a night, and instead was staying on as long as the Ishams' visit lasted.

"The Catholic is right in one thing," she told them; "there should always be a fast before a feast! After the lean weeks at Assisi it is refreshing even to taste the flesh pots of the Bracciano again."

She joined their excursions to the neighbouring hill towns, spent a night with them at Orvieto, and in the moonlight on the terrace of the Brufani with her ex-adorer Teddy Isham seemed a pleasant indulgence after her weeks of total abstinence at Assisi, it was not unnatural and should be accounted to the sins of the church. Yet the charm of low-lying Umbria would not be shaken off, and she felt it clinging strong upon her, as they idled over their coffee and liqueur, despite the association of these familiar Americans. To-night she was chatting more recklessly than usual; for Teddy and she were alone by chance, having come outside to prolong their *tête-à-tête*, and she knew she had flirted with him up to a probable day of reckoning.

"There is one thing to be grateful for over here, anyway," said her victim, blowing rings at the moon; "we all hang together after dinner. At home we have to go off and smoke till we have fumigated every germ of an idea out of our heads, and wish we were back with the girls——"

"While the women talk about their settlement work or compare gowns, or tell appendicitis stories!" groaned Gertie.

"I remember one woman assuring me I was an economic factor. What is an economic factor?"

"You are not an economic anything!" Teddy Isham's eyes roved over her frock approvingly. Her hair was coiffured deliciously to his mind, and her absurdly high-heeled shoes were the colour of her gown to a nicety. She was just the girl for a theatre party and a cosy little club supper afterward. Just the girl to take on a motor trip, to be seen with in the corridors of smart hotels; how well she would take to the comrade ways of a life *à deux*! What good hard sense she had too, to keep a fellow out of a scrape, if necessary! She was a man's girl decidedly. Strange that none of them could make her see her vocation!

She began telling him about her own adventures among the poor, but quickly tired of her subject, sighing gustily:

"Oh, dear, how forlorn it all is! The only happy people are those who work for the Lord like my Boston cousins." Adding inconsequently, "Life is very dreary, after all."

Young Isham straightened up. "What has become of your Englishman?" he asked sharply. "Did you throw him over?"

Gertie turned her whole face upon him candidly. The full moon was not more lucid.

"No," she said; "I merely said Oh, no, no, never! Not at all."

"Poor beggar!" muttered the boy. "And what did he say?"

"He asked why," she answered readily, "and I said our sense of humour was totally different."

"Did he accept that?"

"I think so,—he had to in a way,—but I suspect he did not understand it. That would have been too subtle to hope for. He had a way of talking about what he had read in the newspapers that was unbearable," she added as if aware that her listener was unconvinced. "He also had a dreary passion for anecdotes."

There was a long pause, during which the moon stared unabashed at both of them. He leaned forward and poured himself another glass of Marsala.

"What do you do with all the hearts that are given to you? Or are they too disabled to be of any farther use?"

He tried to speak lightly.

"Why, I am collecting—didn't you know it? I have one genuine *antica* that I picked up at Rome out near Tivoli in Hadrian's villa; but most of them are too young to be of any real value to the serious collector."

"Like mine?"

He wished his voice would keep steady! She

looked up at him under mischievously lowered lashes.

“Yours will grow old, just give it time. *Anticas*, genuine ones, are not made in a day. I don’t collect any that are not genuine,” she said. Then she told him a little experience of her own in the rag market at Rome. A tiny urchin was standing behind a lace booth, holding a baby sister so young that its wrinkled face looked like Japanese ivory. Just for nonsense she had asked him: “For sale? *Quanto costa?*” “*Si, si!*” cried the child, radiant; “*Antica verita!*”

But Teddy was not much amused and reverted to their original topic.

“You will probably die an old maid,” he pronounced, as if reading the future from the face of the sky.

“Hardly likely; a fool and her money are soon mated,” she reminded him; “but I would rather be a widow than anything——”

“That is not in taste, that joke,” he said curtly.

“No names being named, how does it concern you? I have often met men I could not have lived with, but whose memory I could have cherished safely dead, as no man was ever mourned!”

“Don’t trifle with serious things you don’t understand, it is young.”

He was blushing like a girl, confound it! he felt it and knew she was laughing at him. There was not a cloud in sight to cover that grinning old moon either.

"A sense of humour is eternally at variance with romance——"

"Yours is over-developed——" he began.

"Be that as it may, the veil and the grande passion are equally not for me—or any other heroic rôle. No, Teddy, I am like that grasshopper in the nursery rhyme:

"And for me everlastingly hopping!"

"You will be engaged before you leave Italy," protested the boy.

"If I am, it will be broken before I enter Suisse. Every engagement ought to be broken once by law," she added as if deep in her own thoughts.

"Why?" demanded Teddy Isham.

"To see if it makes either of the parties unhappy, of course. No man need ever suppose he can make a woman happy if he can't make her unhappy."

"That is brutal and aboriginal." He threw away his cigar with energy.

"No, it is good sense and better psychology," insisted Gertie; "I could explain it to you in detail if you wanted me to, in theory and practice."

"I am perfectly willing to practise the first half of the demonstration at once!"

"Shall we go?" she suggested, rising to lean once more over the flower-twined balustrade where the moonlight turned the roses pale with the passion of the night's dewy face stooping over them.

"To begin making me unhappy at once?" She did not reply. "If you are tired of this, let us stroll around to the Square and watch the fountain in the moonlight. It is early yet, the moon won't be going home for hours." Gertie shivered slightly.

"Are you cold?"

He was all remonstrance immediately, picking up her fallen scarf and gently replacing it over her shoulders. Teddy Isham was an irreproachable Squire of Dames. Not his to commit any of the lovable blunders of the greater brotherhood of man. He never offered the momentary mistress of his heart a flower thorn first, in all his life, or arranged the most complicated and misleading wrap upside down. Confusion of feminine detail was not one of his failings. Some women delighted in his appreciation of their lace and linen; others found it the occasion of a commiserating shrug, so difficult to satisfy are the manifold daughters of Eve.

Gertie wrapped herself still more closely before she spoke.

"It was not that I was cold," she said slowly. It was another bit of psychology; sort of a wind-blowing-over-my-grave feeling, like a presentiment of evil."

"Seeing ghosts?" he chaffed her, covering her hand with his own warm palm, a cold and white little hand as it lay upon his arm. The contact brought her to herself. Clare's trouble, which seemed to deepen instead of growing lighter, had told on her nerves more than she was aware, and Teddy was a dear to care for such a companion as herself at all. Thus reasoning, she roused herself with effort to shake off her tremors, and they chatted in their accustomed fashion as they crossed the square of the Prefetura in the streams of yellow lights and through the grim streets towards the Piazza Publico, where the moonbeams again were revelling, only heightening the darkness that clung to the forbidding walls of the Duomo and Palazzo with their backs turned toward the spring night in its soft refulgence. They leaned against the sombre wall within the murky shadow to watch the ceaseless flowing of the fountain and to refresh themselves with its silver rhythm. There it was, mossy and cool and wakeful. A visible dream of the May night, murmuring the secret words that lovers use in a half audible cadence while in keeping with the

mystery of its whispering, Italian footsteps fell at intervals upon the flagging, stealthy footsteps, hardly more noticeable than the shadows that ran before. Both nature and humanity were lying in wonder under the hypnotic spell of the Perugian night. How long they had stood there neither could have told, so complete was the sense of enchantment. Suddenly Gertie shivered again and laid her other hand impulsively on her companion's arm.

"Ghosts again? What have you done to the Raspanti that they should haunt you?" he asked, grateful to any friendly spirits that turned her femininely timid of a sudden.

"Bloodthirsty old corner!" was all the explanation she deigned to him as they turned homeward, nor could she have explained to herself why she had concealed the reason of her nameless terror, for the eyes she had conjured out of the night were those of Count Variani.

It was with an unspeakable presage of coming evil that Gertie set off next day on her returning drive to Assisi. Disappointed protest on the part of the regretful circle she was so abruptly abandoning failed to swerve her from her decision, nor did Teddy Isham's nonsensical insinuations of ghosts or nocturnal warnings bring any but forced laughter

to her lips. Biancha, who was by chance returning also, having been sent to the Brufani on a commission from the Padrona of the Evasio the day before, was proud indeed to accompany her. So she was saved the long drive in protection of the well-meaning Americans who would not have let her start alone. Fortunately the peasant beauty was silent, and Gertie's fear and apprehensions had ample opportunity to tumble over themselves in anxious confusion, the monotonous running of the water in the fountain of the Piazza setting them all to its continuous measure.

What might Count Variani be doing in this remote hillside fastness of Italy? Half-forgotten estates in outlying Umbrian provinces did not attract men of pleasure from capitals to solitudes. Art nor nature held the clue she was seeking. Only a woman could afford the key; she wondered what woman? Not a random sight-seer surely. Some affair of rustic gallantry? Hardly, though if a wild flower fell at his feet he was a man to pick it up for a moment's gratification, and as easily cast it down. Her face grew small and set with the keenness of her attempted penetration. One sickening thought she put from her; not even to herself would she admit the cool, unsullied name of her cousin to enter among her thronging specu-

lations. Yet the more she cast it out, the more convincing her fear grew. It was Clare whose presence had drawn this man to the vicinity, against his will perhaps. Oh cruelty on cruelty! How dare he profane her proximity! Who had betrayed her sanctuary? He had no rights of coercion, perhaps, yet his very existence was a humiliation, an insult. It would have been better if the full steps for divorce had been unreservedly taken, better to die than to be forever shaken by the ignoble fear of pursuit. She saw again in a flash of memory the wonderful luminous eyes that had met hers from the shadow under the *Duomo* the night before. The figure was romantically draped in the long Italian cloak, but worn as the boulevards of Paris wear it. The features were dim in shade, yet the whole physiognomy of the man was proclaimed to her by those eyes that were as soft as those of a loving brute, yet could flash as the turning of a sabre blade or smile as the sun on the heart of some gentle forest where the call of the wild bird to its mate is ever undisturbed.

It was not until they began to make the ascent of the hill up to Assisi that Biancha's rigid stare struck her as entirely unnatural. What restraint she must have imposed upon herself! Gazing toward her, Gertie was impressed anew

tening perfection. There was a rich velvety of animal beauty about the young peasant girl attractive, after the jaded complexities of the strenuously civilised womanhood of her own . . . The carnation in her cheeks bloomed in colour, her eyes seemed alight with some flame, the wealth of her hair drew even a regard to the shape of her neck and shoulder where the kerchief that checked the glance inuring descent over the full lines of her bosom, as loudly as it ostensibly concealed.

A sculptor would have conceived her firm, young, and a peasant sighed for her round, young

A flower in full bloom, flaring open with exposed to wandering bee or to butterfly of the—the old simile struck Gertie as she turned for Beppo by natural association of a feminine: from the girl to her lover.

Beppo?" echoed Biancha, as if her senses were nger alive to his touch or heart awake to his

. " *Si, si signorina*, Beppo was well; *va bene re*," but gone away since a few days past to the old priest, who was also his uncle, in his ey cart as far, perhaps, as Subiaco."

and you are sad without him?" queried Gertie

fe? but why?" responded Biancha unexpect-

edly. "*Dio mio!* I am never sad! It is Beppo who weeps, not I." Nor did she look the lovelorn damsel.

"A year from now you will be a married woman," continued Gertie.

Biancha shrugged as she drawled "*Chi sa domani?*" The inevitable Italian evasion—who knows to-morrow? "The saints only can say!" she cried, and burst into tears.

Gertie was thoroughly alarmed now.

"Why, Biancha, what has happened? What is the trouble with you?" she begged, but Biancha would only stammer in a confused murmur of Beppo's jealousy and the misery it was that a poor girl should never look in but one pair of eyes, at least not without dreaming of the knife after—till she were better dead than alive!

Probably it was merely an unaccountable outburst of the emotional Italian temperament. Gerti wisely dismissed the incident, changing the subject and chattering of the fruit and vegetables like a blue-aproned market woman at four o'clock in the morning, while Biancha laughed gleefully over astonishing mistakes the signorina made, that wildered even her intelligent ears by queerer and queerer seasons in which the signorina's ignorance was displayed. For Gertie firmly believed

potatoes sprang up from bulbs like the hyacinths under the olive terraces, and was even vague as to the hour when the grapes began to ripen on their trellises. She did not know how many times each year the sweet-smelling hay was to be cut and carried in. Small wonder that Biancha forgot herself amid such a profusion of market garden heresies! Biancha was puzzling most as to what the American signorinas did think about, and if that shadow something was what made them seductive to the great titled signors of the cities like Rome and Napoli. Probably the signor who paid such a price for her foolish kisses did not think of the harvest either, or the number of cabbages to be planted in a row. Perhaps he never even remembered the danger of the birds pecking at the finest of the fruit in the orchard? It all grew more and more confusing. Father Benardino of course pondered all day and most of the night, too, it was likely, on the Seven Mysteries. But of what did the signora and signorinas dream? Biancha gave it up. She did not imagine that a celebrated French poet had wondered over the same thing and concluded:

"Peut' etre a moi,—peut' etre rien!"

It was a relief to find all unchanged at the Evasio. Here at least no phantoms hovered, and

they welcomed their prodigal with eager lips. They were so glad to get her back that she hushed her intention to talk of the proposed motor trip to Paris, urged upon her acceptance by another party of American friends just ready to do the conventional run along the Riviera. She felt herself her aunt's soldier, and indeed under fire none was truer. If harm was lurking she would be at her post on picket duty; let others do their wisest, no one should deter her from her personal vigilance. Meantime she watched Clare and Father Benardino for signs of the times. Lloyd told her they had continued their reading about as usual in her absence. Security seemed assured, so she kept her own counsel and relegated her fears to the chill of midnight Perugia.

And yet was nothing changed? Ah, where could the days flit by without leaving their trouble's shadow, if not upon the grass, upon the lapsing life of humanity? Clare had drifted into a remote stage of her experience. It was impossible to analyse the difference, but her will was less assertive, while physically her condition was one of youthful health and vigour. Paolo surely had taken step deeper behind those filigree doors of church, that look like lace and are in reality wrought iron. They saw him rarely now; a

accompanied by an older priest, and though he did not lift his eyes toward them, his manner betrayed consciousness of their proximity. Sex dying hard and fighting still for life.

To the girl's sympathetic imaginations his sandalled feet every day retreated farther and farther from the joy of the world, and Clare seemed constantly more resentful of Lloyd's designating him as "the little brother of Trilby." Indeed, they all followed him in their daily remembrance, and often spoke of his fate, as people are wont to do where life is externally uneventful. And Gertie herself was not quite the same perhaps,—“not quite so Gertie-esque,” Lloyd called, diagnosing her case as one of the guilty conscience she might be supposed to be harbouring as a result of her Perugian season. “Be sure your sin will find you in!” he warned her.

Of course the Ishams drove over to dine, and do the church, and of course Teddy shadowed her from crypt to belfry until he got his opportunity to urge his poor heart on her again.

“Take it and keep it, or do anything you like with it, it is of no value to me; I can't use it again,” he had ended rather lamely, and of course he grew eloquent in blaming her for the reckless week past, with its too encouraging intimacy.

Then she, knowing she had yielded to her most besetting temptation and flirted him gaily to the brink of his own undoing, grew wilful and ungentle, protesting that his heart could be of no more use to her than a Chinese junk. She should not know what to do with it or where to keep it, not in the least, thereupon running downstairs to the lower church where the Isham sisters were resting and raving over their drive of the morning.

"So romantic, so historic, so Italian!" they reiterated in a rising chorus. "And who was the handsome man we saw walking beyond the bridge?" they asked.

Clare was silent. This visit was a real trial to her; she had plead with her mother to be allowed to keep her room, but failing that, she had effaced herself as much as possible and taken no part in the gossip that flew lightly around the circle, nor cared to assist in the revelation of the hidden richness of her beloved retreat. It was Mrs. Reynolds who now supplied the name of Father Benardino.

"We think him distinguished-looking," she said; adding, "He bears a saintly reputation here."

The younger Miss Isham laughed.

"The man we saw will never come within several calendars of the priesthood, my dear Mrs. Reynolds! He was every inch a noble, and his coachman was

walking the horses in the road below. He seemed to be enjoying a promenade with someone on the foot path above—the trees are so thick just at that point we could not see the person with whom he was engaged. We felt sure you would know him." She looked at Gertie as if she suspected her of concealing contraband goods, and challenged her to produce them!

"Another intrigue," said Clare indifferently. "It is daily bread to the Italians; they would rather intrigue than drink."

"Lead us this day into temptation, is their unconscious petition with every pater noster," said Lloyd.

"I don't see why they were walking," began Miss Isham.

"Because they did not want the coachman to hear them plan their next meeting," suggested Gertie.

"Well, then, why not make the coachman walk? It would be much more suitable, I should——" The older Miss Isham held to her subject like a lobster.

"Temptation sometimes seems a matter of latitude and longitude, anyway," broke in Gertie.

"Imagine going about it in the morning in America!" Lloyd's interest was manifestly languid and ebbing at every effort. He wished the Ishams were in the inner chapel, locked in, and all other interlopers had never been born.

"That is the worst of long expatriation," said Mrs. Reynolds, taking up Gertie's idea thoughtfully. "Even one's God gets dependent for conception on environment somewhat. In Summerfield he is our Father, in Italy he is a superstition, in Germany he is an imperial institution, in Paris he is not!"

"The requirements upon Him are more restricted at Summerfield." Clare spoke before she thought. She had not intended to be drawn into the conversation. "For the three great events in life there He suffices—birth, death, and marriage, I mean. Affliction is understood there as His will; discipline is natural and expected, one is not confounded there by the spectacle of millions imploring for their personal escape and mercy. It is far easier to formulate, and then believe in the formula in any limited area; doubt grows with distance and a sight of the broken multitudes whose prayer seems never to be heard, much less answered."

"With faith go morals," added Lloyd. "One never says nowadays that a thing is wicked; one admits it is out of taste!"

They had come out of the church as they talked and Lloyd's pipe was so refractory in lighting that they lingered on the stairway leading to the upper Piazza.

"Who could be wicked here?" gushed

ounger Isham, her eyes on Lloyd, whose capture he would mightily fancy, if it proved feasible.

"Ah, there is no wrong without two, since the tragedy of the garden of Eden! Society is to blame," admitted Mrs. Reynolds. "Emerson was right; we do 'descend to meet.' Social relation at best instantly implies social evasion, reserves, barriers imposed between, to hedge self from self,—to preserve what I want you to think of me and defend what you are afraid I will think of you! The desire of all men's approbation being imbedded deep in egoism of both evading souls that dare not ask perfect truth. Tom Hardy understood it when he said it was impossible for anyone living on a poor to be vulgar."

"Or for anyone who lives apart in the spiritual world, or in the cloister," said Clare, thinking of the convent.

"Truth abounds in solitudes for lack of prey—that your idea?" asked Lloyd. "I believe myself duality is a necessary ingredient for a lie; falsehood only begins with the soul's relation to another."

The younger Miss Isham yawned. Mr. Benedict was dreadfully prosy; it could not be he enjoyed such long-winded discussions, probably he was longing to get off with Gertie and talk nonsense.

The sun was making long shadows on the plain and already the spring day had submissively turned its face away to other horizons. The fiascos of departure began soon after. It was not until the carriage had made several vain starts and was really setting off that the mysterious stranger was mentioned farther.

"Be sure to let me hear if you discover the race or name of the hillside Adonis!" Maud Isham had called back over her shoulder. Clare did not seem to heed her, nodding a careless farewell, but Gertie paled as Lloyd called after her: "Leave that Gertie!"

"Well, I am glad I never did like Maud Isham said Gertie, in a justifying tone as Lloyd bowed again in mock reverence, responding to yet another wave of her parasol from the turn in the road where the carriage was still visible. "She is always running after some man!"

"The Lord be praised if there is one girl in the world who is running after us!" Lloyd declared fervently. But as Clare and her sister turned away, his eyes met hers filled with concern.

"Lloyd," she said very low, "I have fear Italians say. Someone else has got to know

I know. Count Variani is in this region, nearer even than we think. It is he the Ishams saw——"

Lloyd did not speak at once; his face looked almost too emotionless to be true. Something in her earnestness struck an answering note of frankness from his deliberation, and he laid his hand on her shoulder and spoke to her as if she had been another man, and one whom he trusted.

"I know it."

"How long has he been here, and how do you know it?"

"Since before the May Pardon; I followed him."

Gertie drew a spasmodic breath.

"Is it Clare?" she whispered.

"Perhaps." His voice betrayed no alarm and steadied her by its warmth.

"But you will never in this world let him get near her?" She had caught his arm in her excitement, as if bound to keep him to his duty.

"Never; in this world or the next, or the world after next!" he said quietly.

Gertie gave a shuddering sigh of relief. What was it to have someone to watch over one as he watched over Clare! she thought. And she reproached her cousin mentally for dallying with Catholicism with this man weighing in the balance!

She did not give her feeling utterance, and Lloyd only guessed it by her face.

He read it there, however, and turned to her soberly with a very unexpected question: "Gertie, where is Donald now?" Instantly her manner contracted, her face hardening:

"The last time I saw him he said he was going to hell," she replied, with perfect directness.

Lloyd was really hurt and a little shocked. It always sickened him to hear a woman speak in that flippant way. Clare was never guilty of the offence; yet one could forgive Gertie for it—one had to. She was not a person of constrained perfections, she was too acutely human.

"What did you say to that?" The dialogue was unusual enough to admit of natural curiosity.

"Oh, I said he ought to be devoutly grateful he had a hell to go to. Some of us out in this wide old world have not got even that one spot we can call our own!"

"Incorrigible!" exclaimed Lloyd, but he saw through her flimsy outworks of defence, and pitied her in his heart.

"You only remind me of one person on earth,—and that is a man,—a friend of mine who su-rendered as hard as you will one of these day. He wrote his wife during their first separation af

their honeymoon 'Thank God! I miss you.' For all your lovers you are not happy, Gertie," he said warningly, noticing as he looked at her critically how strained her eyes had grown and how tensely her aristocratic mouth was held in control. "Don't you forget that the wages of sin is death!"

"And the sinner works hard for them too!" she assented; but he did not see her mouth quiver as she laughed lest her coward eyes should overflow.

"I wish you trusted me," he said simply.

Was it Lloyd or life that was cruel? Or both? he could not separate them. Even Paolo was enable to-day, Father Benardino supremely blest, and Clare,—what Clare's fate seemed to her she refused to define to her own clamouring soul. Beside the vision of a great love, even "the pleasures of sin for a season" had suddenly lost their purple savour.

CHAPTER XI

THE CARCERI

WHY do you go so often in the direction of the Carceri?" asked Father Benardino of Lloyd one afternoon about a week later, as they met at the juncture of the highway and the rocky path.

"The view is an extensive one," replied Lloyd simply.

"The path is a steep one," objected the priest.

"For ladies perhaps. I like to get a solitary constitutional every day, and, as I said, the view attracts me also."

If there was something conclusive in his manner it must have wholly escaped the priest, for he continued unrebuffed:

"It is not as varied as the one to the castle; no, decidedly the panorama is superior higher, toward the mountains, and the flowers are quite as charming, even more abundant," he added innocently, as if remembering to have seen them in Lloyd's hands on his return from his long tramps of late.

"I like the Carceri well enough," said Lloyd indifferently.

"Oh, you Americans, you do not say all you think!" was the priest's inward rejoinder, but aloud he said only, "Try the castle path to-day; it is one of the most renowned in Umbria."

As they parted the shadow of the cross-eyed peasant fell across their path. It seemed not to have been an unexpected meeting. They spoke rapidly and of course in Italian, and Lloyd had no excuse for lingering to gratify his curiosity, but it seemed to him that their manner was oddly intimate, though the external forms exacted between peasant and priest were strictly preserved. The peasant spoke hurriedly, and as Lloyd turned the sharp angle upward on the hillside he saw those ill-reputed eyes of his were following him as he chose his way, not to the castle, but to the Carceri. Father Benardino had not moved, and still stood with his face turned toward the highway. The distance was not great enough, as the path doubled on its upward course, to prevent his hearing a distinct "*grazie mille*," one of the few Italian phrases in which he could not be mistaken. Evidently the peasant had been entrusted with some commission well performed: the coin slipped stealthily into his palm did not escape unobserved by those cool American eyes.

As he swung along up the incline he found himself pondering over the possible interest that could unite so ill-assorted a pair, more than the view of the valley or the famous old ruin of the Carceri itself. It might have been a mile farther on that a rustling in the underbrush of the thick oak forest made him turn his head swiftly in the direction whence it came. Some startled bird perhaps or a snake gliding hurriedly away from the sound of his footfall over the dry leaves left in ridges from the previous fall. But no, flat on a rock lay Beppo. He fingered his knife with lazy satisfaction; the blade, bright as glass, caught a sunbeam and flashed right in Lloyd's face. Beppo heard him instantly and, replacing the weapon, lay as before, a picture of slothful content. His closed eyes repudiated conversation, but Lloyd was too thoroughly aroused to pass him, as Beppo probably calculated that he should, and with his limited ability in the language he accosted him to ask what he was doing up there.

Beppo roused himself with apparent difficulty from the deep coils of summer sleep before he answered:

"Niente, signor."

"Why do you climb so high to do it?"

"For the same reason as the signor, perhaps!"

"But I walk and you sleep?"

"It is the same thing," said Beppo, yawning, and he closed his eyes.

"What will the Padrona say?" asked Lloyd, stepping nearer him to draw him out farther as to his purposeless *siesta*, if indeed it was so purposeless. The figure on the rock did not trouble itself to alter its position perceptibly nor did the eyes unclose.

"The noble signor will not remember to have seen Beppo, who has gone this afternoon by gracious permission to serve his old grandmother on the plain below Assisi," he said suavely. His eyes were still closed. Lloyd laughed and left him. Was there ever such a race as the Italian for intrigue? How often he had asked himself that question! Beppo's laziness was an easy mystery,—it was stupid of him to have given it a sinister construction, even for a moment. Perhaps he too was waiting for the priest; the path to the Carceri seemed popular this soft spring afternoon.

It was not for the Carceri indeed that he had so stubbornly adhered to his path so often traversed before, though the intrinsic charm of it had lured many a romance lover hither. Lloyd was sufficiently familiar with the origin of those crumbling huts whose doorways are meshed over with long

streamers of ivy, and he had been there often enough to know the story of the shifting fortunes of the monastic retreat and the various orders that have inhabited it: from an humble hermitage to a powerful monastery, and then for an uncounted interval the chance hospice of wandering bird or beast, to whom its crumbling doors and broken panes offered hospitality, as well as to the wayfaring weather that blew through its unguarded halls and drove the slanting rain inside for shelter from the ferocity of the pursuing wind.

He knew the turns in the path that gave unhindered glimpses of the Tescio curving its winding course rapidly seaward far underneath, the bold beauty of the ravine had often delighted him; the mingling tints of forest and orchard. He had often chased the light-footed yellow orchid through the woods halfway up the ascent, feeling every one a nymph surprised in flight! The long-stemmed violets, too, in their season purpled the pathway in profusion, luxuriant yet rare, inspiring his fancy to animate the fragrant foreground and receding vistas with those mythical beings attributed by his favourite Greek poets to the Idalian groves. No inhabitants visibly disputed the region of the abode of vanished hermits now, except the cross-eyed pea-

ant, who probably had sought refuge up in these lonely places from the suspicion of his former neighbours, who held him in ill favour and told evil tales of his dark wiles. To meet him at mid-day even, betokened ill-starred love affairs, they contested; sick cattle or a stumbling donkey, attended by a host of minor malignities were sure to follow. He could ill-wish one that the children might succumb to contagious diseases, and rot the crops in the ground, were he so disposed. He was held responsible for grapes that mildewed in the vineyards or hens that refused to lay; nothing could convince them to the contrary. So the innocent victim of these bigoted sign-mongers withdrew, after the fashion of the persecuted souls of all ages, and lived among the friendly birds and beasts in a little hut on the edge of the forest. Alone save for the donkey with a white face, said also to be possessed of powers no donkey but a freak of the Spirit of Darkness might legitimately claim. They averred it understood every word the peasant said to it, and they declared, moreover, that it never met a priest without braying. It was common belief that its master asked advice of it in matters of secrecy, though it appeared to the unprejudiced observer to be a docile little creature, intelligent as

all brutes are that live close to human beings, and patient under any burden imposed upon it, even the insinuations of the community.

This afternoon Lloyd was sure he heard voices as he passed the hut. For an instant he wondered vaguely how the peasant could have preceded him. Then the absurdity of his attempting the surveillance of a remote Umbrian hillside provoked his sense of the grotesque, and he began to whistle Beppo's usual tune as he sat down near the old bridge in sight of the hut to rest and ruminate. He was determined to confront his situation in regard to Clare; to come to some understanding with himself as to what was to be the outcome of his aimless dawdling on at Assisi.

He deliberately allowed himself to shut his eyes and summon a vision of her, unhindered by scruples or resolves. He exulted over her in a passionate rush of intoxication. This was his form of indulgence! He unleashed his patient heart, nay, he challenged it to do its worst. The white flower he always likened to her face rose before him in all its former girlhood sweetness, deepened by the charm of experience in the woman who has known love, the sybil with the open book so far transcending t' uncomplete loveliness of that younger, more brilliant Clare.

He yielded to the richness of her nature. How he loved her! How he suffered in this forced acceptance of her thrall! Yet she had not loved him, or at least not enough to marry him, and now another's name was linked with hers, while he sat wastefully brooding over her lost perfection.

The world was full of women for the loving! Gay women and tender women; women with all shades of hair, except hers; with eyes arch or alluring, with noses Greek or *retroussé*. Love need not be cast down or die because Clare had wedded herself with an Italian libertine. He must shake off this hypnotism and give over the boy's love to find the mate of the man. It would hurt to drag the familiar flower from his heart,—the concealed perfume had been the sweetest inspiration of his life,—but men never died of love. Clare was married, if not happily; and if the priest once got her into the church of her husband it was the deathblow to his torturing hope of winning her at last for his own. Divorce and remarriage would then be a crime—Clare would never contemplate such an offence against creed or society. He did not feel sure of her estimate of divorce, or feel ready to sound her conviction lest it prove in opposition to his own. Yet only a fool would wait on blindly, as he was waiting, to see the sacrifice of her woman-

hood consummated. He reasoned himself into a hard mood of contempt for his own weakness.

Suddenly above the cool measure of reason his heart cried Liar! You cheat yourself with thin evasions! You want her as you have always wanted her! As you always would want her if you married any number of those gay or tender women, whose eyes were any colour except hers. It is the light in her hair that smites you blind even now, the lure in her eyes that draws you farther and farther from self control, and her voice—ah, yes, forget her, do! Tear out this flower of your heart, but your very soul will bleed and the pain will never heal at the touch of another, though it be a caress. Your sleep will bring dreams of her to crush your waking resolutions; faithless dreams for which you are not to blame. Your last word if you had but one with which to conjure paradise would be her name! While you are free, you may hope in silence without wronging your ideal, or one of those gay or tender creatures you propose to love; and that crumb from life's table is daily bread more sustaining than a feast without the thought of her as its most cherished guest. Liar! You pretend you could leave her when already you are counting the minutes till you can see her. It is for the luxury of returning to her that you impose this brief absence upon your-

self. It is because you are so sure that you will stay within her call that you boast your vain boast of freedom!

Ah, it was too true. He was so happy in the reversal of his decision to renounce her that he felt he had actually won her. How dismal the prospect had loomed before him, peopled by other women he might learn to love! He could not wait to return and assure himself that all was unchanged, that he could still hear her voice, with the sad note in it, and that no awful gulf had opened already between them caused by his fleeting flagrant resolution.

He must have been sitting there an hour or more, for his cigar was long finished, the idler's way of telling time. Several times he believed himself to have heard a woman's low voice near at hand, passionately Italian, but he dismissed it as an illusion, a faint echo of the stream which often creates the impression of voices if one lingers beside it long enough to become absorbed in its rhythms. The afternoon was growing dull as he started downward. He wound his way by the path for a time, then struck through the woods to reach the torrent bed and cut off the circuitous distance. It took him a trifle longer than he anticipated, but he found the rocky channel of the spring torrent at last, and was about to descend a steep decline when, just below

him in the thicket of underbrush, he perceived a peasant girl and a man in close embrace. Even as he looked, the girl raised her glowing face from his breast, and he fumbled hastily with her corsage as if to place some talisman within. Again he took her in his arms and kissed her full on her red mouth, then he was gone, but not before Lloyd had recognised in him none other than the very man he sought, Count Variani, while the radiant creature of his embrace was Biancha.

In a flash he recalled the voices up above. He must have held them there in the hut then, more or less against their will, during his entire *siesta*, and they must have thought to elude him through their keener knowledge of the mountainside learned of goats and torrents, believing him to be far behind them on his homeward way. It was not for Biancha's peril that his heart seemed of a sudden turned to an aching clod in his side. Let her go to perdition by the money of anyone whose largess she preferred to take. It was Clare who stood in real peril, Clare whom he was sworn to save. The easy lips of a handsome *contadina* offered no snare to such as Variani, and the note at this instant in her bosom, he knew was no tender talisman for the girl, still athrill from his amorous touch; no, that was the instrument of a higher destruction, which

he, Lloyd, was sent there by the Almighty to prevent.

He easily contrived to overtake Biancha and wait for her just before the path came out upon the highway where he had stood chatting with Father Bernardino earlier in the afternoon. She was running, for she had sadly outstayed her allotted hour, but he would not permit her to pass him.

Holding her firmly by her sleeve, he detained her as he bade her listen to him in spite of her pleading: "*Tropo tardo, signor! scusi!*" and appealing eyes full of fright for the consequences of the afternoon.

"Give it to me!" he demanded.

"But what?" she asked, astonished.

"You know!"

"I know nothing." She shook her head as if bewildered.

"Give me what is above your heart."

"Above my heart? Nothing, signor. I do not understand."

He would not wait to bring her to terms; he knew the Italian tongue too scantily and the Italian nature too well. He retained his hold on her, always protesting, until he dragged the slip of paper from its hiding place; it was warm from her racing blood. He still maintained his grip on her hand that had gone spasmodically to her bodice to conceal her

secret, but with the other Biancha fought fiercely to regain it in vain. When she was quiet, Lloyd said slowly: "For whom?"

Biancha was mute.

"I know," he said doggedly. "For the Signora Americana."

Biancha crossed herself. He was a magician, a sorcerer, this grim fellow who saw what was inside one's bodice and read even the thought concealed there. She made the sign to avert the evil eye, and continued to hold her fingers crossed as she waited, matching his obstinacy with her own.

"Why do you give a love letter from your lover to another?" he queried, with a swift change of tactics, hoping to stir her jealousy and surprise the mystery out of her.

"Not for him I do it!" retorted Biancha hotly; "for his friend. It is not Biancha alone, but the holy father himself who holds communication with him."

He could draw nothing more from her except that the Signora Clare was cold and cruel, that an Italian heart was being killed for love of her while her evil friends caged her from him. All the world might see how miserable the poor Signora was! ⁵ white and still! Her own lover had vowed to be his friend or revenge him, and had chosen b

trust with his message. She loved the white Signora, she would die to serve him who needed her, she would die rather than fail him! A vendetta on any who prevented her!

"Hush, Biancha; be silent!" commanded Lloyd. "You will die if you don't go home and be absolutely quiet about all this story."

She drew a quick breath through teeth closed defiantly: "And who will kill me?" she said insolently, drawing herself up in her old mocking attitude, with one hand on her hip, while she struggled to free the other from his grasp.

"Beppo!" said Lloyd, as he flung her hand from him and let her go. He tore the crumpled note to atoms, as if its very existence contaminated. It was written in French, he noticed, as it fluttered away on the breeze, but what it contained of perfidy he should never know, nor would Clare.

The question that repeated itself with most insistence in his mind was what part was played by the priest, if any, in this bold intrigue? Dare he force a husband, even a Catholic noble of the inner circle of Rome, upon a being like Clare? He acquitted him of this, even if his church saw, by such action, an opportunity to reclaim her ultimately, with her fortune,—to its avaricious arms.

A matter of gold and kisses involving Biancha

alone was an affair swiftly disposed of. She was an innocent dupe: the priest might look after his own, since he himself was not a professional philanthropist, but his own countrywoman he would defend from surprise or betrayal with wits or weapons as events might decree.

Beppo's knife occurred to him more than once. Variani's jealousy he realised was warp and woof of him. Clare ignored, lonely, suffering, would have left him unmoved, kept him the appointed distance; but Clare recovering her beauty, surrounded by admiring friends, rich and desirable, or even contemplating a Sisterhood, was sure to arouse in his nature a renewed fury of possession.

Who could give her up to whom she had once given herself? The rush of feeling that overwhelmed him was too swift, too fiery for indulgence. The snares seemed encompassing his idol; he must act forcibly and finally before it was too late. Biancha, the cross-eyed peasant, or the priest might any of them thwart him by an Italian cunning wholly alien to his own calculation or resourceful power. He knew by intuition that while Beppo would hate Biancha for treachery toward him, all the more he might aid the false lover to avenge his own broken heart.

He would not speak to Mrs. Reynolds before

morning. She should be saved a useless white night, while she could. But he swore by all past pain and future happiness that all three women should be on a train for civilisation on the morrow. Good-bye to this haunt of legend and intrigue, and to all stealthy Italians and alluring mystical religions. They should get away from the ruinous antique and surviving mediæval to the sky-towering peaks of Switzerland, where the twilight of romance melts away before the dazzling sun of reality.

He heard many demands for Beppo about the inn at suppertime, but he did not appear, and once a voice from the courtyard answered that he was with his grandmother's goats on the hillside, and had not yet returned. But as Beppo himself had suggested, the Signor Americano did not remember to undeceive them, though the figure on the rock flashed rather unpleasantly distinct before his fancy, the knife shining like glass in the stray beam of sunshine.

CHAPTER XII

'A STORMY CONFESSIONAL

THE day had been fair, but the rain had come with the darkness. Clare loved the sound of it on the roof. It always seemed to her like the arrival of some dear, familiar guest. It mingled with her last consciousness, bringing a sense of heightened safety and repose.

Father Benardino waked with a startled certainty of continued rapping. He had written long and prayed longer, it must have been after his first welcome sleep, that dreamless sleep of the earlier hours of the night, or his confused senses would have rallied sooner to his assistance. All was silent in the Evasio. Perhaps some belated traveller had attempted to rouse the Padrona for a bed and shelter. Wind and rain hurled themselves against the window pane as if they were fain of shelter too, and the wooden blinds rattled dismally as the bones of the unquiet dead. Again the ragged knocking, hurried as if someone was in trouble. Evidently the inn had a good conscience, for it slept on. Convinced that necessity alone would have power to call a

human being forth on such a night, the kindly Father sprang from his bed and hastily gathering the quilt around him attempted to open the window. At first the wind took his breath and the rain made him shrink back, but above the noise of the storm a voice lifted to him its burden: "Father, a dying man! Come for the love of God!"

"I am coming, I am coming!"

He closed the window softly even as he spoke, and hastily dressing, he half consciously muttered prayers for the unshriven soul awaiting his last consolation.

As he stepped out into the storm, a scared peasant face met his own.

"Is it far, my son?" he asked.

"Far indeed, my Father, on a night like this; the donkey knows the way, but the path is steep and wild and I must go alone to the village below, to wake the notary. Small hope as there is he find aught but a corpse if he return with me!"

Already he had disappeared into the night. Father Benardino laid his hand on the little animal's head as gently as it had been a child receiving his blessing at a First Communion. As he did so, he recognised by the flaring candle of a shrine within the window the white muzzle of the donkey from the hut near the Carceri with calm eyes turned on

him trustfully, though it cowered from the drenching rain.

"Forward then, little guide," he said reassuringly, scorning the idea of mounting as the peasant intended him to do, and they set off against the blackness together. Up the steep, stony street, past the silent houses, crossing the highway, and at last turning sharply and mounting again by a path that seemed to have started back toward the Carceri, or up to heaven itself.

At first the patter of the four tiny hoofs and the tread of the two human feet made a measure regular enough for a regiment on the march, but once off the beaten path the four hoofs began to hurry, to lose and gain step, to slip, to pick and choose among the stones of the dry torrent bed that was all the road there was to choose from. Father Benardino ceased his audible prayers for the dying to encourage the tired messenger from time to time. His own heart beat hard from the effort of the climb and his hands were scratched from overhanging trees or sharp rocks upon which he stumbled continually. Where they were going was to him only surmise, but the donkey did not betray the least hesitation as on and up they crept, the darkness thicker for the single fainting light from the lantern in his hand that scarcely penetrated farther than the animal's

steaming flanks. At last a light, the door of a hut open wide to give a dying man the air—there being nothing else to give him. The little donkey looked over its shoulder and disappeared in a rough shed, its night work done apparently, as if confiding all future responsibility to the priest.

He was already robing for the last offices, his eyes fixed on the figure lying upon the floor, a figure as proud and motionless as one of the reliefs on the tombs in his own sacred crypt of Assisi far below. Ancestry asserted itself in every stark line of the coma-possessed form. At the first sound of the hallowed voice in the administration of the sacrament, the closed eyelids lifted, then dropped again, but in that one glance betrayed the eyes of a gentleman recognising his equal. No midnight marauder this on the one hand and no unshaven parish priest offering the conventional consolation to the dying on the other.

That the victim before him was Variani, Father Benardino did not suspect, for the name meant nothing to him with its disguising title; but as he bent over the man, he instantly recognised him as one who had crossed his own path before, in the years vowed to be forgotten of earthly life, before the sundering of mortal ties. What had brought his long ago enemy to the Carceri had certainly nothing

in common with the Penitents who had sought it for centuries before. This was no penitent before him!

He either could not or would not say how he had met his death blow, a knife wound, from which the blood was hardly staunched by the rude aid peasant intelligence could afford. Even the hurried, unintelligible confession failed to elucidate the mystery. A vendetta perhaps, some ill-starred affair of evil gallantry surprised. But what had sent such a man into the woods above Assisi? What had driven him toward Assisi at all? Had it any possible connection with the American's preoccupation there?

His life seemed all but spent. He lay as one in the first torpor of approaching death, while the priest, having performed his office, still continued to pray above him, as for a passing soul.

Outside the rain held up a ghastly winding-sheet and the wind stayed its dark horses at the open door as if in search of a spirit postillion. It might have been an hour that dragged slowly by before the wounded man opened his eyes again, and a flash of mutual recognition passed between them.

"You!" he whispered feebly, as if making a last supreme effort to recall the face of the priest bending over him. "You?" he said again more

aguely. "I owe you satisfaction; I did you an eternal wrong——"

"No, no," interrupted the priest. "You did that has led to my eternal blessing."

"What was it?" The groping voice became confused in its effort to remember. "*Si, si*; I took your wife." The dying man's lips moved with increasing weakness.

"But you restored my faith!" said the priest, closing his eyes devoutly.

"She left me soon." The voice ebbed perceptibly. "Where is she now?" His eyelids fluttered and closed.

"God knows," sighed the priest gently.

"*Dio mio*, but she was beautiful! Pray for her; she needs it; it is too late to pray for me!" He smiled a derisive smile, terrible to behold on a face so near its finality.

"She left me," he continued without opening his eyes. "They all leave me. Even the other left me, though I took the trouble to marry her. My success with women was never long. Pray for them all!" He laughed his old, worldly laugh that the gaming tables and race courses knew no better than the foyers and boudoirs of Paris. "All over before I reach the last hurdle!" he cried, raising himself suddenly, and then came delirium again,

delirium scorching the holy ears into which its muddy lava stream was poured. Again and again, over and over with every tortuous ingenuity of a wandering brain, one name he cursed—"Paolina!"

At the sound of it, her face rose before him like an empty wine-glass; a powerless charm summoned too late when its magic potency is burned out. What sin had he sinned that he, the consecrated priest, should see again across his protesting vision that profile of hers with its cameo-cut, her glossy Italian hair laid down above her marble brow adorned by the great pearl ornament, worn in oriental fashion, that hung almost between her eyes of night and all that night implies? Why should he know again the touch of that olive skin? Perceive again that outline of more than classic perfection—sensuous, seductive, appealing to all in man that answers to its worst temptation. A creature of flame she was, a summer tempest leaving destruction in the wake of her lightning. Her smile made men forget that there was aught to reckon with in the pains of hell, and heaven, won at cost of her loss, to appear a feeble refuge for the old and broken spirited!

Of noble birth she was; but now, ah, now! A Florentine whose pride was no less haughty than

the house of Medici; yet echoes of her fate came to him across the supernatural abyss that spread between them; once a Cardinal's "friend," now a courtesan of fabulous repute; her carriage smothered in roses, her naked breast clothed with diamonds.

As the dying man wandered more intimately back amid the scenes of his sins, the Father fell on his knees and buried his face in his hands. There was no awakening of desire in his own purified heart, but even to think or re-think of the past seemed to him utter profanation. How infinite was God's mercy to have reclaimed him from such lusts of the flesh! How incomprehensible were the unrestrained appetites of unredeemed mankind! He dedicated himself to purity and service of its mission anew. Memories of his own damned him. Old raptures swept lightly over him, and though he shrank from them in holy rebellion, yet they assailed his inner vision, tormented his conscience with old emotions, ardently as he strove to exercise every interpolation between him and his petitions for light upon this passing soul.

Paolina had been less than a name to him for twenty years. She could not harm him now, safe in his hard-earned consecration, yet to the sensitive soul the mere contemplation of sin is contamination.

He realised too fully the temptation to scorn the tempted; not from sheer love of the sinner after the divine manner, but from a very human understanding of the insidious love by which the sinner fell. Who better than he could know the evil wile of the false-hearted beauty who had once been his own? This dying man had used the power of an unstinted influence to cover the crime he committed—his was a family whose will could not be gainsaid in safety to the opposer. And he was a younger son, near enough to the title and fortune to be secure of his own ends, yet sufficiently shielded by the reigning older brother to dare an audacious license beyond all opposition.

And from the first yielding to the guilty whim of a moment, what perdition had come to them both! The woman going down her steep path, glittering but sure of its destination; the man dying here in his superb maturity, the prey of careless passions first called into life by her instigation. It was not strange that the priest quailed at each repetition of the cadence of her name on these blanched lips, quailed not for himself, but for the debasing of humanity.

The rain had ceased its incantations and the calm that fell emphasised the prolonging of suspense; enfolded more closely these two men stranded to-

ther in the lonely wastes of night and death. The peasant had not returned, and out of all the world's fickle avenues of meeting and missing these two, no longer fever-passioned youths, no longer friends, no longer enemies, had been brought and laid face to face in the chastened afterward of life.

Suddenly, as it had begun, the muttering ceased. The cynical laughter was hushed. Once more the straining eyes opened and roved about the mean walls of the tiny hut until they reached the kneeling figure by his side.

"Bring my wife," he whispered with entire simplicity, and fainted.

Father Benardino was grateful for the swoon. To refuse such a request at such a crisis would have meant brutal cruelty, yet to grant it, how impossible! That he had a wife whom the world recognised as such was in itself improbable. Had he merely wandered again? It seemed more than unlikely that in a saner moment he had repented and wed with innocence as better men might do, but if he had, and the church had allowed him for reasons of its own—the priest felt the cold creep over him at the thought. Unconsciously he began to pray for that woman, whoever she might be. Not in direct petition, but offering the prayers of

his church, while an unknown woman's soul lay as a heavy shadow across his own.

It was the pain induced by trying to move ever so slightly that brought Variani to himself again, for restoratives there were none in the desolate hut, and the priest had brought with him only such as a departing soul had need of. As before, for a few moments the incoherent murmuring ensued, until, as the voice died away spent, another name detached itself from the confusion of meaningless sentences. Another name whispered as if into sanity out of longing—"Clare!"

Father Benardino rose from his knees. For the first time in his priesthood no prayer came to his lips. Until that instant, prayer had been always to him a weapon. In temptation his heart had lifted an unerring Pater Noster for relief and aid. In the darkest hour of pain or when care had pressed most grievously upon him, prayer had been his hidden resource. Prayer had been the continued intercourse of his heart with that power which sustained it. In gratitude, in fear, his heart gave thanks or raised entreaty to the Eternal. Now in his bewilderment he felt the discrepancy between reciting the prayers of the church, as a holy office permitted by grace to her priesthood to establish the mediation of the saints, and the vital need of

the soul going unannounced to its Father, with a distress too awful for restrained approach.

The prayers of his rosary forsook him in his extremity. He wrung his hands over the wreckage of such precious souls as these, and staggering, groping, to the open door he lifted his eyes beyond the paling stars and, unhindered by the nearer vision of intercepting crucifix or shrine, he fixed his gaze on the heart of heaven and cried aloud in his native tongue for mercy from God upon these distorted destinies.

Toward morning the peasant returned alone. The notary was confined to his bed with the rheumatism, and his wife forbade him to sally forth on a devil's errand with evil company in such weather as that provided by the night just passed. It was as well; the sick man was quieter now, sunk into the lethargy that would not rouse for long hours, if indeed it ever unclouded to this world again.

Under the priest's simple questioning the peasant became obtuse to stupidity. He could not be led to imagine more than he actually knew. He had no suggestion to offer, no probable explanations to give. He had been asleep and dreaming when he heard a noise and a man had fallen over his door-sill, throwing wide the rickety door by the pressure of his inanimate body. Father Bernardino cautioned

him to think carefully, to strain his memory to recall what impulse had guided him to the Evasio for help, instead of to the monastery or any of the resident priests.

"Only his desire," reiterated the peasant, exculpating himself eagerly.

"He spoke, then? He expressed this wish in words?"

"*Si, si*, your Reverence. Would I have gone otherwise?"

"Tell me all!" said the priest imperatively, and the peasant recounted faithfully his meagre part in the story of the night, while the listener sought in vain for a thread by which the tangled skein of fate might be unwound.

"The noble Signor was alone. He fell into the hut upon his face, weak from the flowing of blood. When I turned him and held the candle in his face I saw it was the same of whom I spoke with your Reverence earlier in the day. He said it was nothing,—when he revived after cold water on his wound and a gulp of wine,—he would not speak farther; he wished to be left in silence. He was quiet and it might have been that he slept; but later he groaned always, and cried out for a priest."

"But why did you seek me out? This is im-

portant, my son; try to remember," urged Father Benardino patiently.

"Listen, your Reverence; as I started he called me back. 'Go to the stranger at the Evasio,' he told me. 'Say only a dying man—he will come; he will understand what is necessary to follow if I die; to him alone will I confide my commands. Hasten!' Before I could question or obey, the faintness had taken him, he knew no more.

"You cannot say at what hour you were awakened?"

"Only by the number of my dreams, your Reverence. I had slept soon after the night fell at about the hour of the birds' silence."

The priest noted the hours that must have elapsed in the interval before his own summons. Hours carrying with them forever the chance for full confession and the joys of conscious absolution.

At sunrise, the timorous peasant no longer being afraid to be left with the ghastly intruder, Death, the tired priest turned homeward for a brief period of investigation and reinforcement; not unmindful of a grave "*a river derci*" to the faithful little donkey with the white face, already cropping the sparse growth of the lonely hillside to fortify himself for the duties of another day.

There was much that required meditation as well as immediate performance. In the event of the stranger's death, so closely impending, ugly complications would arise, and the life of the cross-eyed peasant would be jeopardised as well as that of others. Well might the experience of the night destroy the calm of his habitual piety. He cherished no bitterness against the man who had robbed him in his youth and dragged himself like a smitten animal to die away from human pity at last, dependent upon him for hope of pardon from on high. Only a great, past agony stared him in the face as from an open coffin.

The saint in him rejoiced in hardness; the priest prayed continuously for a sinner returning home, though late; the man was effaced in the vow that made him one of the Order of Jesus.

Sunlight bathed the lines of weariness from his brow as the feathered brothers and sisters of St. Francis greeted him on the wing. The odour of hidden wild flowers refreshed his jaded nerves. Through the ravines flashed streams of water renewed by the rains of the night before, that ran away singing of spirit summons to sacred retreats in the forest untrod of man. The red glory of a new day swung back the mists from the plain below and made them look up to the transfigured heights

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above. The visioned eyes of the "Poverello" might have beheld a crown of spirit stars encircling the head of his submissive and adoring follower, but to Biancha it was only a sunbeam that made the Father's face to shine as he bade her a cheerful "*bon giorno*" on his way through the courtyard of the inn.

CHAPTER XIII

A VISION OF THE NIGHT

FATHER BENARDINO was not meditating on the seven mysteries to-night. One sufficed him. The furtive candle-light flared on the face of the ivory crucifix opposite him above his desk, in sympathy with the high wind outside, for a tempest was riding over the valley in pursuit of its preceding brother, and doing its best to hurl the little Evasio to the green plains below in passing.

"She has every beauty but the beauty of holiness, every grace but the grace of God!" he said to himself. She had silenced him as by an edict of the church when she bade him never speak to her of her husband. How her voice stayed in his soul as she gave that appealing command! And afterward, when she cried despairingly, "You do not understand!"

"We never speak to her of her husband," Mrs. Reynolds had once told him, with a hint of authority in her manner. "We are letting time heal the wounds that are daily becoming mere scars of remembrance."

He was scourging his memory now to discover if he had heard that name Variani pronounced by any of them, either directly or with inadvertence; if he had ever heard it before in their connection or in any connection that could have enlightened him as to their relation with it. Ought he to have associated it with either past or present? That name, where had he heard it recently? It was common enough in Rome, but not as he had heard it spoken. He remembered the night, the handsome face, the battered form lying on the floor of the peasant hut on the hills above Assisi. Only the sword faithful to the mortally wounded man as he lay apparently dying, alone; the sword and his grey Italian cloak destined to serve, it appeared, as his winding sheet.

What had brought him there, none of the excited peasants could say, after they had overcome their dread of the evil-eyed owner of the hut sufficiently to mount by the winding foot-path, drawn by sheer curiosity to the scene of the tragedy. His will, for Death had obligingly waited upon the pleasure of the notary's wife and rheumatism, had not been made after all, having been duly registered elsewhere long before. His formal confession had been that of many a dying noble before him. His sins were many and ordinary enough to men of his

class. He was all he ought not to have been, but that was not what was holding the priest's conscience rigid over an abyss of indecision to-night.

With all his creed, he held divorce and remarriage a sin against God and the church. He had so taught always. He had counselled, prayed, hoped to turn this wilful American mother and her beautiful, misguided child into the way of true duty, where lies the soul's one plea for lasting peace. Later the Catholic faith would win her perhaps, nay, of a surety it must! But as a man,—and some priests are men,—could he in conscience hand this white soul of purity over to a self-confessed libertine? Must he as a priest follow the course that to a mere man of honour would be hateful and repulsive?

He examined himself sternly for a flaw in his own attitude that might cause his hesitation, but in vain. He reminded himself with submission that it was the commandment of his order, yet, if this girl was his sister? Again he raised his eyes to the pale crucifix, seeking guidance as a child from its mother's face. Sacrifice, duty, oh, a million times yes! Self-surrender, unstintedly; but sacrifice for love and purity! Nay, the ivory features above him seemed to rebuke him, for fellow-man!

The crucifix looked reproachfully down at him in the wan candle-light. Still his heart urged its objection. For fellow-men, yes; Christ died to save sinners, but not corruption for the innocent like this woman-child. The crucifix reminded him that the Lamb of God was innocent as never human soul born of woman might hope to be; yes, but the infamy of His suffering unjustly borne redeemed a world. What shall it redeem to condemn this young life to useless shame? Was any suffering useless to God? Was he judging God's providence? The clock struck one, still the struggle went on.

Who could have foreseen that the stranger would have lived on from hour to hour with breath feebly fluttering, yet surely growing more assured? Not the cross-eyed peasant surely, who came every day with the white-faced donkey to report to the Father and bring money for the church to insure a mass said for the tormented soul that could not break its earthly bonds and pass; thereby greatly inconveniencing his unwilling host. Until to-night the priest had shared the night watches with the peasant, but never had a glimmering of consciousness returned to make speech possible or consolation suited to the making of a good death.

Again he drew from his hiding place the letter that for long weeks he had worn on his person as

sealed orders from those higher in authority. One sentence at the close he read and re-read, although he was perfectly familiar with every word of its contents. "She is young, betrayed, hopeless; why should the Mother Church not gather her to its breast? Either by means of her miraculous gifts of healing or through duty toward her husband, who bears a powerful name."

He had exerted every talent vouchsafed him from God to obey, and this was her husband. This was the fate to which he must give her over if his faith prevailed. Manhood opposed such arbitrary interpretation of the right.

All the past rose up before him; his own, Variani's, and Paolina's. Her face mocked at him in its insolent, youthful splendour of long years ago, to be dismissed from his meditation without a tremor. She was nothing that need enter upon the arena of his soul. None of the Jesuit order would have recognised his face as he cast from him the last associations of his stormy youth that her memory aroused, as if she and he had been other persons in another world.

He sent his mind back over the last days and weeks to clarify his own purposes. When the cross-eyed peasant had first come to him saying that a stranger wanted to bear him an important message,

a friend of the American signora's husband, he had instantly believed himself to perceive the hidden working of the distant powers at Rome. For a week his attempts at a meeting had been thwarted from day to day, the stranger seeming averse to the publicity of the town and preferring for reasons of his own to preserve his incognito. In any other country' suspicion would have been stirred by proceedings so irregular, but in Umbria it is not so, where the native Italian never goes straight to his aim if there be a devious route open to his invention. He had questioned the cross-eyed peasant most searchingly, but he was frankly unable to relate anything beyond the facts that he had seen a *signor nobili* on the hillside at various times. He could not say whence he came or whither he went. He was ignorant of all save the two occasions when, after chance encounter, gold had been put in his hand, and he had been told to seek out Father Benardino and request an appointment in the region of the Carceri. It was this very gold that was now buying the intercession of the saints, for the peasant feared it ill-omened, being stained with the blood of a murdered man, and would none of it in recompense for his enforced hospitality or troubled nights.

When Father Benardino had first received the anonymous summons he had returned the answer

that he would know who sought him and the nature of his communication, and the few words returned to him had been scrawled on the gilt-edged leaf of a notebook, torn out at random, and had been merely these: "A friend of her husband." And now he sat trying to piece it all together as best he might. He had written but once to the Brother at Rome who had instigated his delicate mission, concerning his progress; from him the hope must have been given for an approach to the forbidden woman, encouraged by the presence of the favouring priest, and leaving all the rest to his manipulation. If this supposition were true, it would explain his having been wanted on the fatal night, as the victim would, with his first realisation of his position, beg for the presence of a priest to whom he could trust the sequence of events likely to follow, though he too was in ignorance of the identity of Father Bernardino, who had disappeared from the world without a sign.

He had never heard the name of Count Variani mentioned; externals hardly existed for him, and Rome had given him a mere shadow outline, content to whisper that the ruptured marriage with which he was to concern himself affected one of high estate in Catholic circles, whose importance justified the interference of sacred authorities. He

could not recall one instance of the name in his frequent intercourse with those at the *albergo Evasio*. To the *Padrona* or *Biancha*, Clare was the "*Signora Altra*," to distinguish her from her mother: from the lips of whom or those of her cousin that name would never fall. The American called her "*Santa Chiara*," a proceeding that was repulsive for many reasons, as it was unenlightening. If he had known that she was the *Contessa Variani*, it would still in no way have connected her with the dying stranger in whom he had so swiftly recognised his former enemy, for, by the death of an older brother, both name and title lent a disguise completely enfolding his personality.

But he had murmured her name, "Clare," and the rest had been simple to verify. As his interest in her conversion had deepened to enthusiasm, he had forgotten the semi-instruction of his superiors in a keen, personal desire to help a suffering soul of no ordinary beauty and vocation. And now the end was tragedy, and the ultimate end was not yet to be determined. No one could have predicted even a temporary rally, yet here was this battered physique resisting dissolution, despite the stress of years of debauched living and its consequent weakening of will and members. Entrusted to the wisdom and diplomacy of the priest, too, in its utter

helplessness to protect itself from exposure : discovery.

With a hundred chances against him to be a one for him, the priest suffered from his conviction that this half one would prevail. This man who had broken his life once would live to tempt him again, as no earthly temptation ever could. What would his duty become then? Should he have strength to obey the letter of the law in his submission to the will of his church? Oh, why did he doubt God's ability to give him strength this as for the mighty ordeals of his past?

To him, marriage was the one irrevocable, alterable fact in the life of the world. Himself considered to have left that life, and his priesthood was to him as the rising of a soul from the darkness of perdition, through purgatory to eternal light of the Spirit that is paradise. His youth had been wrenched from him by the infidelity of his wife. Anguish had distorted his entire being after her dishonourable loss. He never dreamed of trying to lessen its bitterness or to escape the fate that had overtaken him. Such an attempt he considered folly since the discipline destined for him as his due must be his following shadow, how his soul might seek to evade it. The perfection of his priesthood developed from the sanctifying

orrow and the crucifixion of natural passions fully
live rather than from the untempted vocation of
the born saint.

Too often, saints are accounted as wholly white
and sanctified, while, in reality, in their fellowship
one finds, as among the Alpine brotherhoods, that
there are some peaks of seamed side whose rough
endurance, worn by avalanche and blast, stand in
just as abiding fulfilment of their lofty destiny as
their more radiant brothers from whose white cowls
the dazzling snows never melt, bewildering the poor,
human eyes that would look up humbly toward their
earth-forgetting heights.

Father Bernardino had stood in the midst of the
world, and borne its burdens as he had known its
transient sweets. He insisted on forgiveness with
the divine insight of one who has himself been for-
given much, even as he forgave. Once when Clare
had been in a petulant mood and demanded of him
why God allowed sin in His world which He made
for His pleasure, he had striven to wake in her
soul something of his own spirit, in relation to her
husband, whom he had designated vaguely as
"those who sin against us." He had dwelt on
God's happiness in forgiving sin, his patient deal-
ing with the sinner in opposition to the summary
methods of mankind against an offender. He had

borne down upon God's suffering over the needless sin of the world, the costly mistakes neglectful of providential remonstrance, the hardness of heart, and the joy of the world cast out deliberately for the heaviness of evil-doing. She had listened with the rapt sweetness of a young angel, but expressed no softening toward the man whose name she so unwillingly bore.

In the rupture of this solemn tie which the priest held final, there were no distracting elements for consideration. There was no child to complicate duty with worldly calculation or to unify those separated hearts by an impersonal compulsion stronger than any their selfish attraction had hitherto felt or proved. If there had been a child, a little son with eyes of sunshine like his father's and hair like the aureola his mother wore so unconsciously, ah, how much more potent those clinging shackles than any of the clumsy mechanism contrived by the mighty church at Rome!

Such an advocate would make the problem too easy, dissolve it in fact or have prevented its conception. Priests need not pray distractedly over the hearts where a child is enthroned: that kingdom needs nor envoys nor armies. This problem was one of a naked soul.

He eliminated Clare's will as he did her happi-

ness, her life, even the risk to her of contamination with such as her husband had been and was to-day, unless the final absolution had cleansed his sins. In his weakness of pity for her he counselled himself to remember that the untried, untempted soul is worthless. He repeated to his troubled spirit that the only virtue lay in reclaimed character. Let her do her duty, and he would trust God for the rest!

This had been perfectly clear to him in his unalterable determination to unite her with an unknown and probably misjudged spirit. He was lenient toward the hasty causes of alienation possible between two fiery young hearts, unschooled in the difficulties of mutual acceptance, erring from love itself perhaps. Love so eager to claim, so prone to wound; jealous through its own excess; proud from its sacred certainty of its inviolable worth. The difference in nationality, too, helped him to create a thousand excuses for their impulsive separation: he had imagined temperamental difficulties being less troublesome than those caused from habit and custom necessarily readjusted and readapted to the new conditions of wedded intimacy, but nothing had warned him of the actual abyss stretching impassable between these two souls.

Long as he had meditated upon her future in the

abstract, it became an entirely new question to him as he pondered the hideous truth of her husband as the dissolute despoiler of his own youthful hearth. If Variani recovered his senses sufficiently to crave anything, he would ask again for his wife. The summons might be delayed, but it would come. Then should he, the priest, be prepared to move her by every force of argument and sentiment at his command to take her rightful place at the sinner's bedside? Or was his the soul to take upon itself the responsibility of refusing delivery of the message? He did not quail before his own unwanted audacity as he met the appalling thought.

How had the blow fallen? There again assistance in forming his decision was denied him. Who had struck Variani down, and why, remained shrouded in mystery. The American's obstinate preference for the path to the Carceri recurred to him more than once, and a more latent revelation which he had never before permitted himself to recognise, of the American's care for his countrywoman having in its quality something essentially un-Italian in its reserve, yet an intensity of purpose difficult for the Southern nature to reconcile with any emotion save one.

If the American loved her, what would it mean to her future? If he loved her, would he slay to

his happiness? Did it follow? He knew to reckon with his native blood, but not with cool temperance of this nature from over the

ther Benardino's eyes sought the crucifix in position for his judgment of another by the diverse standards of humanity. He was great enough to put his enemy's personality from him, did not weigh against his search for right in disposal of Clare's future. His temptation now in a subtler form, the form of a pure dream he never permitted himself to indulge, lest it wrong the stern conception of the marriage vow and her sworn to it. The dream of her in some exalted condition where her body and soul should be given over to the adoration of the Most High.

When Variani died, this one thing he promised himself to perform, if God permitted. If Variani lived on then he began to retrace his weary reasoning over again, interspersed with prayer and the gazing of the ivory crucifix upon the wall, before which the single candle flared to its end, yet burned still.

The hours passed him by in troubled silence, and he, recognising him to be in the grip of an adversary beyond her assail, left him unapproached by her white poppy spells and sought the easy lids

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of weary peasants. It was not until his vigil was well-nigh spent that he started up with a smothered groan at the remembrance of this first clue to the name Variani. It had come to his unrecking ears through the grating of the confessional at the season of the May Pardon, and the voice that lisped it was surely none other than Biancha's!

CHAPTER XIV.

MAN AND PRIEST

IT was but a brief day later that the summons came. Father Benardino had known that it would, from the very intensity of his desire that it should not. He had arranged as decently as he could for the sufferer's comfort, consistently with the privacy he felt himself bound to observe, giving strict orders to the cross-eyed peasant and seeing that they were followed out himself—the peasant women, who are often good nurses in an untaught way, refusing to approach the hut for fear of the influence of those unfortunately twisted eyes of its owner. He had spent an exhausting morning by the wounded man, who seemed trembling between recovery and collapse, little being necessary to incline the balances one way or the other, and now he was hastening to bring the wife thither in response to the insistence of the sick man, whom he feared to injure beyond reparation by greater delay. He was a trifle above the last turning of the path when Lloyd's square shoulders blocked his way. With the American he intended no reckon-

ing. His errand was one of reconciliation above all earthly interference, yet his hands tightened on his breviary when he recognised the obstructing figure, as if prepared for an impending struggle.

He would have passed on with but a formal salutation, as if too preoccupied for more, had not Lloyd remained directly across his path. Scorning all subterfuge, he went unhesitatingly to his mark, guided by intuition for his facts, supplemented by his own unobtrusively-made discoveries.

"I waited for you," he said, looking straight into the eyes of the priest. "I felt sure you would come sooner or later, and I know where you are going. To whom and for whom, and I shall not permit you to carry out your intention."

Father Benardino ignored the surprise of Lloyd's information or the probability of its exactness. With a firm though courteous movement, as if to free his path, he proceeded as if no word had been spoken.

For an interminable instant they remained in this position, silent. Then the priest raised his dark eyes haughtily, as if the church condescended to regard an inferior mortal, and challenged the calm gaze of the American.

"You would not, I presume, be guilty of detaining the messenger of sacred obligations," he began,

but Lloyd merely waited, without a movement enabling him to pass.

He saw it was time to speak, and speak decisively.

"Your object in obstructing me I can only surmise," he said slowly. "If you wish to ask my advice as to your own safest course, or to impress upon me the importance to you of our previous encounter on this path remaining in secrecy, some other occasion must be sought by you. At this moment there is no longer necessity for any concealment of my errand. I am sent by Count Variani to his wife. It is impossible to say if there are hours to waste in discussion of this so natural desire, if even there are remaining the hours necessary for action!"

"You speak advisedly there; hours will be necessary, long hours, to coerce the mother or compel the daughter."

"I shall do neither," rejoined the priest, with dignity. "I shall deliver my appeal and humbly submit the end to a higher justice than all."

"It will not be granted," insisted the American.

"Meanwhile we waste the hours," conceded the priest, with entire reasonableness, as he strove again to continue on his course.

"Stop!" cried Lloyd. "You do not understand what you are doing! You have lived remote from all such relations as those which formerly bound this man and woman, and you do not, you cannot, realise what you propose!"

His voice was full of painfully discordant elements. It was going to be a struggle, but the priest would be forced to yield; he must in pity cease to urge when he was made aware of the truth in this truthless marriage. Truth must prevail, it was beyond his simple creed of uprightness to imagine otherwise. The priest held a patient face toward him, but one which gave no hint of the least moderation.

"By what claim do you exert your influence, if you have such? How have you come to be instrumental in this matter at all?" continued Lloyd, aggravated by his superior silence.

"A dying man has always a claim upon the living, especially a priest." He answered the first clause only, ignoring the second. Lloyd's colour rose angrily.

"A man whose life has blackened and debased all with whom it has come in contact can have no claim on anyone!" he exclaimed.

"Except a claim for forgiveness, my son." It was the priest alone that spoke now, and there

was no rancour in his voice. "That is a universal claim—the dying thief may enter paradise."

"This one shall not! He shall not see her!" asserted Lloyd doggedly, as if he had not heeded the soft answer, nor let his wrath be turned away.

"By what right do you in your turn presume to separate a man from his lawful wife if she is willing to hear his call?"

"She will not heed it——"

"It is precisely to give her the chance before it is too late that I have consented to come."

"The chance for a renewal of misery!"

"No, the chance for escape from eternal self-reproach."

"You shall not speak to her of him!"

"Who will restrain me?"

"I will!"

To Lloyd the question was finished, but he did not stir from his position, and, seeing it, the priest continued:

"And by what right do you, of all men, jeopardise her soul by robbing her of a reconciliation that may shorten purgatory and open the gate of heaven for a sinful soul?"

"The right of an honest man!" retorted Lloyd.
"A man whose will and intellect are instructed

by the decent standards of the world, over the abnormal egotism of a narrow-minded priest!"

"A priest whose will is God's will, and whose intellect is completely surrendered to the higher thought of God." There was no resentment in his tone.

Lloyd was touched and perhaps a little ashamed of his rudeness, in spite of himself. He wanted to hate and despise this man, but it was hard work; there was so much that was splendid about him, for example, the way he took a blow.

"Father Benardino," he said cordially, "drop the priest and meet me man to man. This girl is in your power, perhaps; she is defenceless; the man lying up yonder is not such as you or your church would force upon her if you knew him at his true worth. Of course I know that it is difficult for you to bring your mind to the contemplation of mortal vileness, and it is shameful to speak of such things, yet more shameful not to in this extremity. What this man is and has been you cannot conceive—even the tenets of your church release for adultery——"

He was white with excitement, but Father Benardino remained unmoved, showing no shock of horror and no curiosity for information.

"The greater the sinner the more urgent his need," he murmured.

"This meeting you wish to bring about can only result in humiliation for her, misery of recollection, regret for buried hopes. I ask you to spare her!" he cried.

"And your right to ask this?" asked the priest.

It would have been as simple as base to have insinuated Clare's compliance with his own desire; he scorned the prevarication that might have come to the rescue of a less upright man, as he replied:

"I have only the right of an old friend, a relation scarcely understood in Europe; but were her father living to protect her, he would curse not only this Variani, but the hand that wittingly threw him again across his daughter's life!"

"You have no right? Neither mother nor daughter has sanctioned you? Then I shall go to her at once! Have the goodness to allow me." And he started toward the highway, but the swift, brown fingers of the American gripped him like talons.

"Why do you dare to interfere? What is Clare to you? What is this Variani to you? Nothing! And only the dogmas of a mediæval superstition support you in your effort against common decency and humanity!"

Father Bernardino did not make the slightest effort to release himself.

"That I will explain to her, and to her only,"

he said. "What she is to you already, in your unchastened imagination, I can easily conceive. As the man above is dying, the victim of a cowardly, unknown assassin, I will ask you as the acknowledged lover of that pure woman, his wife, not to detain me longer." And worsted by the insinuation rather than by the Jesuit's authoritative tone of command, Lloyd allowed him to pass.

"She will not hear you," he cried a last time.

"If she refuses, I shall at least understand the source of her inspiration," replied the priest, with a meaning it was now impossible to disregard. A numbness was paralysing Lloyd; his indignation at the injustice of it all could only have found adequate expression in personal violence toward this man by whose side he kept to the very door of the *Evasio*, beneath whose peaceful eaves such heart-break had sought to shelter itself, in vain. All the way he was searching his resourceful brain for some scheme of resistance, some unforeseen hindrance that might prevent the imminent disaster; but his troubled being was powerless to think or act—he knew not how to pray.

At the door they confronted each other *ou* more.

"I entreat you to pause and consider *what y* are about to do," Lloyd begged with *desperati*

"I think only of my duty; if he should die——"

"Wreck a woman for duty! Besides, he will not die; he will live. A sight of her would raise a better man than he from the dead! And if he lives, only remember what he is, consider what your responsibility will involve! A man who has steeped himself in every crime toward women—ah, you cannot understand him! A priest cannot conceive the deadly sins of the flesh of which such men are capable!" Lloyd's voice was strangling with emotion.

"Unforgiveness is a deadly sin," said Father Benardino.

"So is impenitence." Then as if to implore the inscrutable priest for mercy on any terms, he softened his voice to the level of rational inquiry. "Suppose she goes to him now with you, and he lives—would it mean happiness? Could there be any hope of happiness in the reunion of such opposite lives?" Surely the rigours of the church must melt before so unselfish a cry!

A flash of indescribable sympathy swept over the priest's face; for an instant it seemed to promise help, but it was gone as he queried in return:

"Shall you be happy in the future? To whom does the future assure happiness? Where is happiness sure? Or in which gospel is it required of

man? Your question is irrational, you see. It holds no ground against the strict performance of a vow freely taken."

"But can you risk the safety of her future? If her future is safe, that is all I ask."

"Is the future of any mortal being safe? Is your own future safe?" There was double meaning in the interrogation, but it entirely escaped its mark. Lloyd's nature was too deeply ploughed to notice any insinuation, however startling, if directed toward himself.

It seemed to him that he waited hours by that outer door. Life seemed to have stopped there forever. All his after life his memory preserved the trivial sounds that came to his sick senses as he waited. A door shutting with a sudden slam, the noise of a horse crunching his carrots in the stable, the rattle of a passing cart too heavily laden and emitting a distressing creak, even the click of Gertie's golf balls down in the garden—a far-off reminder of a flippant other-world in which until to-day he had played his part. The angle of a sharp shadow on the cathedral etched itself upon his brain. He was miserable with the misery of a strong man, helpless. He had guarded and watched so long, so untiringly, and now he failed at the crucial point.

When he first knew that Count Variani was informed of Clare's retreat at Assisi, and was approaching her from motives of caprice, or more malign intent, he had rushed to her rescue as single-heartedly as ever a knight of old flew to the defence of his liege lady. Whatever the undeclared presence of her husband in their neighbourhood portended, it was an ugly omen, and he had presented himself at Mrs. Reynolds' side in the capacity of unspoken protector and friend. He had never bribed information, being aware of the insecurity and unreliability of that common method in Umbria, but he had hovered over the region he suspected of lurking evil, with alert ears and sleepless eyes. So long as no attempt was made to disturb Clare, so long he was willing to bide his time, and never until his last walk to the Carceri had the complicity of the priest occurred to him as a possible factor in the actual situation.

In a dark corner of his heart he knew he would have killed Variani, careless of the result, rather than to have permitted him to breathe the same air with the woman he had loved as child and maiden. All the honesty and chivalry in his nature refused to unite her with the man whose name she bore. Since their separation, she had in a measure become his to cherish and adore in silence, however

sacredly in secret this privilege was to be hidden. He would have rid her of the incubus of her husband's existence had it menaced her too closely. His purpose had been overpowering. He could not realise yet that fate had interposed, forever ridding him of this murderous duty his fixed idea had imposed upon him.

• Fate or the priest? He was sure now for the first time what he had himself intended; saw now in a flash of comprehension the earnest endeavour of the Jesuit to keep him from the torrent path frequented by Variani in his dealings with the cross-eyed peasant. Was he seeking to save him from a rash deed? Or was he seeking thereby to avoid the consequences that were destined to be meted out to Variani with the same finality, whether from a self-contained little American pistol or the passionate fury of an Italian knife?

Beppo's knife recurred to him as it had a countless number of times since the accident, only to be banished from his recollection as swiftly as it came, by his impulse not to remember its vicinity on that tragic early evening a few days since. And of a sudden, as he stood there in the timeless void where life had come to a permanent standstill, he thought he caught a dim apprehension of why the priest ignored his outcry so disdainfully, put *him*

aside as a worthless adversary. Was it possible that Father Bernardino believed, was it credible he could entertain the idea, that all had not happened as Lloyd was positive it had? Innocence trembled with anger at the suggestion. Guilt leered with the nearness of its possibility. But whose hand had been swifter to avenge? Whose justice had demanded a blow equally foul? How many had been wronged beyond the crushed white flower trampled in the dust? If he, Lloyd, was saved from actual doing of murder, who was to be convicted in his stead? He lost his way in the mazes of right and wrong as they would soon present their claims upon him for future action.

Clare had been in an exalted mood all day.

“Something tells me that the One who made me will not crush me so soon!” she had exclaimed to her mother, who commented on her unusual access of spirit. And yet when Father Bernardino had appeared noiselessly at the open door of their tiny sitting-room, he had scarcely need to speak; she had risen immediately, as if expecting a sentence without reprieve, and gone with him unquestioningly.

Life had betrayed her in her first scant moment of elation as it has so many another. In the mo-

ment when dread slept, the hour had come. She had no courage to evade, though her eyes went dull and the hand was like ice that she laid on her mother's shoulder as she bent to kiss her in mute farewell. Her somnambulistic obedience to the will of the Jesuit was more appalling to Mrs. Reynolds than even the nature of the duty she had so unexpectedly taken upon herself to perform. Was her child to be stolen from her again? Her soul protested as she sprang to her feet and stood listening to the diminishing footfall on the wooden stairs.

Lloyd was aware of their footsteps, too, but he made no effort to arrest them, and Clare passed him unobserved and went out with Father Bernardino. He watched them up the unpeopled street until the turn where the path left the highway, and then going heavily upstairs he threw himself face down upon his narrow bed. He had been willing to damn his soul for her, and she followed the priest's bidding as she might once have obeyed her mother. His torment drove him mad. Were women all fools?

"Trust me," was all Father Bernardino had said to her. "You can, can you not? I have more to forgive him than you, as I told you. Do you understand?" But she seemed to be too far away

her own memories to try to attend to what he said as they climbed the steep ascent to the Carceri together on their strange errand.

The worst of the many worst things about sin, that it involves everyone within its contaminating reach. Let one power of evil expend its forces upon a community, and all must feel it. The priest at the altar, the nun telling her beads before the crucifix, the peasant girl, and the high-born Lord and Lady. Sin contaminates.

It might have been an hour or years or minutes only before Lloyd was following them up the familiar path, instigated by the agonised entreaty of Mrs. Reynolds as well as his own suspense. He never forgot the picture that met his eyes as he reached the overgrown hut; indeed, he was always, through his after life, to associate a certain sort of high spring afternoon with evil and death.

Someone has said he would wish to be a woman until thirty, a soldier till forty, and a priest all the rest of his life! But this May afternoon upon the lonely hillside above Assisi, this priest's face spoke life no light-borne martyrdom. He was kneeling beside the man who again seemed dying, but his inner consciousness was watching fully aware of the woman's strength, counting for her the moments she must endure the strain of the ebbing

misery of this wasted life that slipped so reluctantly from them.

Variani had given Clare one glance as she entered; that was all. Once afterward he had tried to throw his arm about her, but before she could recover from her repulsion to his caress he had muttered a broken sentence that involved a newer passion than any she might have transiently stirred. "Coral earrings, coral kisses." His poor, battered mind could not straighten itself to recognition; it was too late.

She was not weeping; how could she shed tears for a being whose stiffening tongue rang with the unintelligible changes on other women's names? The feebler grew its insistence, the deeper Father Bernardino gave thanks, for he had no will to expose her to the profane secrets of the husband he had attempted to reconcile to her pity and pardon. She was not a woman to sob from sheer weakness or the nearness of death, but the conflict behind her external composure was sharper than that Death was waging with the enfeebled victim, whose will had ceased to count in the struggle.

To her this fallen form preserved the outward semblance of him to whom she owed the first infatuation of womanhood. From these lips she had heard the fragrant language of love and wedded

passion. These eyes had held her heaven—had taught her to tremble with something more overwhelming than happiness, and to shudder for their un-faith. These beautiful, listless hands—the mark of aristocratic lineage in a world where such distinctions counted—now so vainly empty, had once been full of endearing caresses. Yet justice grudged her even the awakened tenderness of a sweet misery of memory—the wrong between them asserted itself in his wandering speech as if to defraud them in honour from a mistaken rush of surging emotion which should cast them upon each other's breast regardless of the wretched interval of separation. It might have been so: love does survive incredible wrongs and draw to itself nourishment out of poisoned bitterness from which the life can never be absolutely clear again. Men and women know from the depths of their experience that love is unreliable until it has forgiven; that it is worthless if it cannot forgive, and that the Lord of infinite wisdom, having fore-ordained this, has made the causes creating the necessity of forgiveness too frequent to leave any heart bereft of its opportunity. It is the most firmly implanted germ of human nature. For years it may lie dormant, unsuspecting its own values, but the hour will come when the soul will harden and die, deny-

ing its right, or become permeated by its transfiguring influence.

Something of all this Clare felt and dimly understood as she, too, knelt by her husband's side. Her heart turned back over their early love, longing for an excuse to condone, to satisfy itself and hunger and thirst no more. But across the diviner inspiration fell the blighting shadows of the reality of existing conditions. His heart was one to which her own made no appeal; these lips were worn by the perjuries given each passing mistress and asked not forgiveness, but momentary gratification. Between them, impassable, stretched the revelation of right and wrong, the intervening months of self-betrayal and physical aversion. This Variani was no longer hers, but a wanton stranger. It shamed her to be near him and submit to his touch. This man had no slightest claim upon her now. It was another man, a creature of her ideals to whom she had unfalteringly given herself. Father Bernardino little imagined the rebellion gathering within her. How could he have foreseen what her impulse would dictate brought face to face with such a challenge?

The afternoon wore away and Lloyd approached the doorway through unbroken quiet, when just as

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his shadow darkened the opening through which the only light entered the hut, Variani roused himself with a last effort——

“Keep her from him!” he cried, choking as he spoke. “Warn her! She will listen, Priest——” His voice trailed off. “To a priest.” It snapped. He fell back, tracing some semblance of a broken cross in the air as his fingers dropped lifeless at his side. His spirit had torn itself from the mocking clay forever.

Clare sank down as if something inside her had given away. “It is finished!” had been her moan of relief.

Lloyd would have been swift to her side, but the priest had risen to his feet and barred the entrance with his uplifted hand, throwing a stern glance at the intruder as he pronounced a formal “Peace be unto this dwelling!” “Not here,” he said. “Death makes all men sacred.” And in his eyes was buried an unspeakable enmity. The minutes passed as the priest, returning to his former position, prayed on, and the woman huddled stupefied by the sudden meaning of it all to her. Finally Father Bernardino raised her very gently and led her toward the air. Her nerves relaxed their fierce tension as she felt the mountain wind touch her

brow. Her body swayed and a sigh rent her as if another spirit, an evil one, had broken from its earthly habitation.

"It is over," she gasped again, with a last swift glance toward what had been the love of her youth, her dream, her life.

"No, it has but just begun." The priest's voice was scarcely stronger than her own.

"My life?" she asked in bewilderment.

"A life of continuous intercession," he whispered. "Swear it now!" His face lighted as by a vision in which her eyes were too dull to discern the relief.

She stared at him blankly as she strove to regain her confused forces.

"I only swore till death," she said as if groping to recall and understand.

"Till death us do part, till death us do part. How strange it is that life parts, but we only swear till death." To all seeming she was ignorant of his existence, but he still supported her and continued with straining intensity to press his claim.

"If you believe anything, if you are more than the veriest heretic, you must believe in the eternal life of paradise, my child! By your own omissions you may have taken the hope of its glory from this prodigal who was your husband. You may even

have lost your own soul through coldness and pharisaical withholding of yourself from the man you swore to honour before the sacred altar. At the terrors of the Last Judgment he may be lost, condemned to outer darkness for lack of love and piety in you! Have you been blameless? While you have been obedient to the letter of the law, has not your desertion of him been the silent accomplice of his evil course? Oh, my daughter, when the cry shall be heard at midnight, must the door be closed to you? And closed by the sin of pride and self-sufficiency? Renunciation is a small price to offer for eternal peace!"

"No, no," she moaned wearily, moving her head from side to side as one in mortal pain. "I am free now, I am free——"

"You can no more be free than a priest can be free of his vows by dishonouring them," he retorted. "You may refuse to acknowledge them, flee them, break them, but as surely as the presence of God is in His world He will seek you out and bind you again!"

He spoke now with the ring of denunciation that was new to her; only his associates knew how near the fires of righteousness and those of self-will burned in this implacable Jesuit soul.

"The world judges differently," she faltered,

“ A woman’s vow is made to a mortal, for life; and that of a priest to God and forever.”

“ A soul dying unreconciled should seal the vocation of any true woman; any other alternative than that of the life I have urged should fill her with horror.”

“ Then India is kinder, where they burn their widows on the funeral pyre! ”

He was arousing her antagonism. He saw it with instant compunction. To avoid so fatal an error in persuasion he led her unresisting to the edge of the stream where he bade her sit down and wait for him until he should be at liberty to accompany her down the winding path to the inn; then he went inside. His reckoning with the dead was all but closed. He had lost to him once in the conflicting chances of life; he might gain through him in death the strongest remaining desire of his soul.

There was little he could do before help was summoned from below to remove the stark burden that had sought the Umbrian hillside with so careless a foot, bent on any adventure save that which he had found.

CHAPTER XV

THE DOOR OF DEATH

CLARE was too ill to know the details of the days that immediately followed. Lloyd had gone away to attend to some business forgeries, but would return later, and Mrs. Reynolds and Gertie hardly missed him in their devotion to whose room they scarcely left. Father Benarzo, sustained by a clean conscience, discovered a very agonising duty faithfully performed to be.

Of course Gertie was of the opinion that everything was his fault from the very beginning, and the present dreary situation had all been of his making. Assisi had been deadly enough at the height, but to have Lloyd gone and Clare so unistingly ill was worse than her fears. It was hard to be blithe of heart through the long, hot days when the white roads seemed to swim in the sunlight and even rise and beckon her to go with them across the valley and up on the opposing hills, over the edge of the horizon into the real world.

She distrusted the Jesuit for some indefinable

reason, and watched Clare night and day when Mrs. Reynolds was not at her daughter's side, as if some worse accident might befall her from the machinations of the sacred enemy. The only time she had taken heart and attempted to stroll alone, she had strayed into the cypress walk leading to the friars' cemetery, and returned more dispiritedly than she went. Meandering about in the lanes above the town with Lloyd was one thing, turning spectre and flitting down the cypress walk alone was quite another, so she refused to leave the little room that held all her world until some dispensation of a delinquent Providence should set her free.

Outside, no one seemed concerned in regard to the young noble's death. Formalities had been duly and indifferently despatched under the exclusive supervision of Father Benardino. The few bags at the hotel in Perugia awaiting his pleasure had been forwarded to the relatives at Rome by his body-servant, so suddenly become as unnecessary as they to this master whose body had received its last attention at the clumsy hands of priests instead of the valet's own artistic fingers. Alphonse distinctly regretted the Count, whose nearer relatives, however, appeared content to leave the whole matter discreetly at rest. The world was not taken into their confidence concerning their reasons. No

one knew whose weapon had felled him. The Italians took it as a matter of course. A man is dead? *E verro!* Someone killed him? *E verro?* Knives are too common, vendettas too ordinary, to worry the Umbrian. He shrugs his shoulders in his leisurely way, drinks again, kisses his favourite, and, if he thinks of it, uncovers at the next shrine he passes as if in acknowledgment of the Virgin's courtesy that the victim was not he. Nor is this quite all of which his attitude consists, for he evinces a tolerable amount of alertness in his avoidance of those obtuse representatives of governmental justice, whose intelligence has so often been known to prove as much awry as their ferocious hats worn broadside, *à la brigand*, and whose performance of duty so often consists in the arrest of any chance bystander whose eyes and tongue might happen to commit a random indiscretion at the blood-warming sight of murder.

Whatever the necessary and unavoidable responsibilities had been, Father Benardino must have assumed them all, for not a lisp of farther news of the tragedy came to the ears of the *albergo*, and the peasant of the evil-eye suffered but a mild access of unpopularity from the story that only reached the town in a garbled version after the hut had resumed its wonted desertion and the tombs of the

Variani received and closed upon the body of the youngest scion of that illustrious house.

Through these days of activity for others, over and over in the feverish memory of Clare, rang the last words of her husband, with their trouble-haunted significance. "Keep her from him!" Who was meant by that incomplete entreaty, half a threat? Who was shielded? Who was implicated? Did he mean to protect her; in some flickering spark of chivalry had his reason returned long enough to connect her with the need for safety? Or had it been a confusion of sense in whose blending no one woman was clearly defined, a mere cry for revenge upon those who should yet live, when his debonair days of worldly pleasure were cut short? And to whom did he refer? Did he really know himself? Counting out the priest, as indeed he must be counted out even by the most lax-minded Catholic, to whom but Lloyd could he have referred? Lloyd! Here her power of consecutive thought left her, or she tried not to think; yet in spite of her effort she was forced to recall incident and action day by day, and again it rang in her ears, that last spasmodic cry: "Keep her from him!" It echoed in her brain, ran in her blood, beat in her heart, sapping her life from her with its sinister conjecture.

It was not until one morning when the vagrant mists were wandering through the valley like mendicant friars of some minor order that she first unclosed her eyes on the motionless watcher who had waited as days and nights passed by, for some hint of returning vitality. Her first effort, when her enfeebled will could guide her bodily weakness, was toward her mother's hand. She reached for it across the coverlid, and when assured by its firm clasp she sank a little lower down on her pillows and slept as an over-weary traveller who has come at last upon shelter.

Days of prostration followed, but she was slowly gaining, and often a few words passed between them, but only of the impersonal changes of light or shadow or the tints of sky that flooded the small room, or the songs of "Sister Lark" that brought the first, faint, far-off smile to Clare's lips as she lay listening to this interpretation of St. Francis' "Canticle of the Sun." The slight swaying of the curtain in the hillside breeze was often the only other sound that disturbed the summer stillness, unless the bells of a donkey cart threw their brazen cheer up to the silent room, or a strolling guitar at evening made the moonlight audible in the Italian way.

The shadow of the cypress trees seemed to

lengthen over the little group at Assisi. Their happy mornings on the balcony, when the fields were full of the children out seeking the narcissus, when the frail vine shadow cast its witching tracery over the vineyards' slopes and the pale young green of the starting corn delighted springtide hunger of the sense, had slipped immeasurable distances behind. Clare accepted the consciousness of the change without questioning, until a stranger appeared during her wakeful hours, bearing the broth that Biancha should have carried.

"Where are they all, mother?" she asked, after the awkward peasant girl had left them, staring rudely about her and falling over the one chair, in her curiosity and embarrassment.

"Who, dear?" Mrs. Reynolds was not sure how to answer, or if they referred to visions of the air or the actual household.

"Gertie, Lloyd," she said. "All of them? It is so still here now I am often afraid they have gone and left you here alone with me."

"Gertie is resting, dear; she has been with you much of the time of late, taking my place."

"But Biancha?"

"She was too unhappy without Beppo, I suppose. He went for his army duty, as they all must, and she has disappeared also. The Padrona

said she was in Perugia working in a larger *albergo*."

Clare waited. Why did her mother stop there? Why did she not speak of Lloyd? She wondered at her own hesitation in asking for him; it was a novel reluctance. She pondered a while with her eyes closed. "And Lloyd?" she added, as if completing the circle rather than from any personal interest.

"He is not with us now. He regretted going while you were ill, but it was imperative, he said; business of some sort or other, I believe."

Clare opened her eyes and looked at her. How worn and tired the sweet face had become!

"Poor darling," she murmured, "you look worn out."

"It is only the heat," protested Mrs. Reynolds glibly enough, but underneath her words there was a visible depression, still to be accounted for.

The subject of Count Variani's death would always continue a forbidden one between them, yet the time might be coming when the veil of mystery enshrouding it would have to be raised, and both prayed it might not be realised. Mrs. Reynolds sat looking out at a tall mummy cypress that seemed folding its secret to itself, keeping its own counsel, like St. Peter Martyr, finger on lip, a fit founder of

the order of perpetual silence, when she was aroused by Clare's voice.

"Have you locked the door of death, mother?"

Mrs. Reynolds smiled thoughtfully.

"What made you think of that old superstition to-day?" she asked.

"Please take down the photograph Gertie made of that one in Perugia," insisted Clare, and Mrs. Reynolds accordingly unpinned the grim souvenir from the whitewashed wall. The *Porte del Mortuccio* used to exist in all the important houses of Perugia beside the main entrance, but they have been so long disused now that they are usually bricked up, and Clare had with difficulty found a good example for her study of this picturesque remnant of superstition. The Etruscans believed that where death had passed, death would pass again. So they built a narrow door, tall and pointed and just a coffin's width, for death to pass out with the corpse, since only through the door that he passed out might he enter again. Through this door of the dead he must go, then, and it was safely locked behind him to the safeguarding of the living.

"Please bolt the door of death. I have decided I am not going to let him in if he comes back for me," Clare continued; but even after this whimsical

assurance of her desire to live, her mother's face bore signs of heavily sustained anxiety. Later in the morning, when she had fallen into a light, midday slumber, the mother, leaning over the bed to arrange the covering, noticed a bit of paper wafted to the floor from an open book by some idle air floating down from Mount Subasio. On it was copied, in Clare's own characterful hand:

"Of all boons death itself may be the best. As for the two Argive youths, Cleobis and Biton, who drew their mother to the temple of Hera and when in sight of all the people, she had prayed to the Goddess to grant them the best thing which man can conceive—they fell asleep and rose no more." A pang smote her as she read and replaced the page. Was God going to give her child, too, the very best thing? And would it be for her to fall asleep and rise no more? This then was perhaps what Clare feared or desired for herself. Ah, in that warm, golden hour of the early Umbrian summer, how she did wall up the gates of death in her own heart! How she increased the barriers and stood before the lock to prevent death from returning to carry her child by the same open portal through which he had passed with her own husband, Clare's father.

Lloyd did not return until Clare's strength, grad-

ually coming back, made it possible for her to be moved for a part of every day to the tiny sitting-room they had made habitable for her with their choicest belongings. Here he would join them for the brief hour allowed, but he too seemed under the spell that had settled down over Assisi, robbing it of its bland serenity. He, too, was constrained and unlike himself. He was restless and eager to get them away from these calm, hazy hillsides at the earliest possible moment. He never went toward the Carceri now, but haunted the cypress walk like an uneasy ghost that cannot find rest in its uncomfortable grave. Sometimes he met the friars of the Minor Observance on their melancholy errand of burial; sometimes he wandered up beyond the streets to the chapels of the Confraternity scattered on the slope amid groves of serious olive and affording a sanctuary formerly for the peasant, where he might at all times enter to rest or pray. From their doorways the faded blue-green hills seemed kneeling, and only the splash of the fountains below or the glint of distant cornfields suggested a common life of active toil. Every pulse had stopped with the increase of the heat. Around the Basilica, where at best so little life centres, scarcely a foot-step broke the stillness until the evening coolness rolled down from the heights or leaped up from

one ravine to another above the refreshing dampness of some persistent stream.

Father Bernardino was only once visible at the door of the sitting-room, and Clare was at loss afterward to explain his evident resentment of Lloyd's presence among them. An aversion seemed to have sprung up between them which neither took much pains to conceal. In spite of all the reasons so freely supplied her to account for the depression of the atmosphere, she felt an unspoken reason, grave and menacing. A suspicion had entered her soul, cruelly unjust or overwhelmingly insupportable.

Once as she lay awake in the night, thinking of love and death, the two great thoughts that alone absorbed her now, she pictured to herself the nearness death might bring a loving woman to her dead lover. What would the common joys of happy lovers be, the passions, kisses or encircling arms, to the power of a love in death folded from human sight? How it would enter the soul when evening wanders forth upon the hills; lie as noontide upon the darkened vision, become as the tropic dawn in loveliness! Having no dissonance, it would abide in tranquillity. No vain occupation or weariness could tarnish it. A pale, beloved presence of eternal beauty; its mystery ever her own; its sprit hand

leading her out upon the endless sea. If love in death is cold, human tears are not. If love in death is cold, at least it changeth not! Love in death could liberate from all earth's fretful fetters. "Oh, I might have been his in death! But I cannot be now!" she had spoken aloud without realising it. Instantly her mother was by her side.

"What is it, Clare? You are not sleeping, are you? Or are you dreaming aloud?"

"I shall never trust a man again, and never love again," she said calmly. "Go to sleep, mother."

"What is troubling you, dear?" The mother's eyes sought deep in the beautiful, wakeful eyes of her child.

"Nothing. I am reading the committal service for love in death, and love in life. It is an old Roman custom to bury in the dead of night. It is all over now, I will go to sleep." And she did, but Mrs. Reynolds lay staring at the stars Guido of Montrefalto loved to gaze upon over these grey walls, till the hot golden day drove the shadows before it and the voices rising from the highways evidenced another day's growth for the vineyards and cornfields and another day's toil for the peasant stooping over them.

Mrs. Reynolds was frankly grateful to the God whom she worshipped through the First Congre-

gational church of Summerfield for the removal of Count Variani. It was a blessing un hoped for, whereby freedom was honourably gained for Clare, who had been so cruelly betrayed by life. Here also was a man, infinitely worthy, whose dearest object in life was to take her wounded happiness into his own keeping and revive the stricken ideals so ruthlessly shattered.

Why then should Clare be suffering from sleepless nights and doubtful days? What nameless misgiving had suddenly seized upon her? True, she saw the priest as a serious obstacle in the path of her own plans for her daughter's future, but she felt confident his influence could be overthrown by a great love and the refuge offered by the church made to seem superfluous in a world where no enemy to her peace existed longer. She had watched Clare as only a mother can watch, and satisfied herself that the unrecognised relation existing between Lloyd and herself only needed release from Variani's claim to become the solution of both their lives. She had felt no scruple in showing Lloyd how willingly she would welcome such an outcome, and without words they two had understood each other from the start, longer ago than the date of his coming with the almond bloom to the Seraphic City. But had she understood Clare? Or had the stranger

priest found access to some unknown reserve that the familiarity of a mother's love had failed to probe, or overlooked?

"Why does not Clare get well, Aunt Jessica?" Gertie's question echoed the anxiety in her own heart. "What is the matter with her? She is not really ill now; she languishes like a girl in a song."

Mrs. Reynolds glanced at the worried face thoughtfully and decided to take Gertie into her confidence.

"I don't know," she said slowly. "I am beginning to be afraid I don't understand Clare as I supposed I did, myself."

"The shock of being brought face to face with Count Variani and his death would naturally affect her," admitted Gertie. "But she does not gain as she ought, and she can't be prostrated with grief. And if it is not mourning for him,—which it plainly can't be,—what is it?"

"Her inability to mourn for him," supplemented her aunt. "It is a terrible position for her."

Mrs. Reynolds remained silent, and Gertie came over and stood beside her chair as she said softly:

"I always thought some day she would care for Lloyd—he is living in the chance of it. If she does, and knows he does, why are we all so misera-

ble? Dear Aunt Jessica, you surely would not wish to keep them apart?"

Mrs. Reynolds shook her head.

"No, I would not keep them apart," she repeated without encouragement.

"Then who is doing it? I can tell you," she said, lowering her voice and tightening her well-cut lips. "It is Father Benardino. He is trying to force Clare to be a Sister, and in some way he is trying to turn her against Lloyd to better accomplish his own ends."

Mrs. Reynolds drew a quick breath. She realised how keen, how unerring Gertie's observation always proved. It might serve them now better than fact or philosophy.

"Have you noticed a difference lately? What makes you think Clare cares less for him now?"

"No, no! I think she cares more, not less, and the priest is afraid of it and is using some argument to bear upon her to hold her here—either some mistaken idea of her duty toward the dead or some influence that makes her distrust her own judgment and paralyses her ability to act! I do wish I could find out what it was!"

"He has seen her but a few minutes at a time," objected her aunt, as if recalling every opportunity since Clare's illness.

"He does not need to see her!" interrupted Gertie. "The air is full of him; he insinuates his effect on her by the prayers she knows he is offering for her every hour of the day, and night too, when honest men are asleep! She reads nothing but the stuff he sends her—'instruction' he calls it. She is being allowed to make a tremendous decision alone and in the dark. That is why she looks so pale and exhausted. If it is all right and above-board, why does she conceal it all from us? Religion is not a secret! If you don't interfere, it will be too late! I am frightened to death lest it is too late already."

"You think she loves Lloyd?"

"How can she help it after—after all that has happened? But she will break his heart, and kill herself too, if that Jesuit makes her believe it is her duty. If it were not for Lloyd, you might reconcile yourself in time to such a pathetic fate for her, but with Lloyd, a lover she does love already in spite of the opposing influences, waiting for her, why do you hesitate?"

There was an odd little catch in Gertie's throat which was not unnoticed by her aunt. "You have always wanted it, Aunt Jessica; you confess that you have——"

"Yes, I have always wanted it." But the re-

sponse was indifferently given, as if some unmentioned hindrance had arisen in the speaker's calculations to make it an old issue.

"Talk to Clare!" begged Gertie. "Find out if this priest is bribing her with promises of heaven. How came he to be so intimately informed about heaven, anyway? There may not be any after all; I almost wish there was not, to disappoint him!"

"I think Clare will speak to me soon; she will do nothing without sharing her decision with me, of that I am certain."

So Gertie had to be content to wait on for the word to come that should open Clare's lips and clear up the situation.

When at last Clare did broach the subject of her morbid preoccupation to her mother, her ideas were received with an entire lack of outcry or surprise. She was baffled, disconcerted even, by the cool unconcern with which her mother turned the diffident suggestion into a proposition for open-minded discussion. She had been strengthening her will for incredulous opposition; all the faculties of resistance were ready for attack, and lo! opposition there was none.

To be sure, Mrs. Reynolds laid all the burden of decision upon her. She neither advised nor refused

her ultimate consent; she listened; she temporised, in short.

"At first I thought I only wanted to die," Clare explained. "I used to lie and dream of Thanatos, God of Death and God of Love—of his sad kisses wet with wine that close the eyes forever to other bliss; I used to recall the marble figure of him in the Vatican, and dream of it, but I am not sure I should find love in death now. I am sure I should not." She was silent, until with a pitiful effort at self-control she added in husky whisper: "Eugenio was terribly changed, mother; there was nothing left for me. I could not love death for his sake, but I was absolutely true to him until death; absolutely in thought and heart."

Her mother laid her lips tenderly upon the glorious hair for her sole response. They had never spoken of him before, since his death.

"If I could trust human nature again, I would rather go away with you when I am able, but I am afraid of life; and if I stay in Italy and forget life entirely in some peaceful retreat, it would be better—or all the same for me."

"Father Bernardino urges this?"

"He approves it."

"He used to profess the Sisterhoods only for exceptional cases."

"Mine is exceptionally sad. He feels I should be saved from costly mistakes, safer from myself and, being under his tuition, I should come to a sense of my duty toward the one who is dead. He considers it a sin for me to neglect the future welfare of a soul gone without preparation."

"Are you willing to rob your life of a present for the sake of a past and a future?"

"He says the present joy is too insignificant to compare with the future of eternal blessedness."

"How does he evade the cruelty of taking you from your mother, to whom you were intrusted by God?"

"He raises no objection to our love, and opposes no barriers. He only shows me the certainty of such a life as he proposes to provide for me, and the wretched unrest of another mistaken experiment such as my life has already been."

"Ah, he does not know the power of love!" cried the older woman.

"I am afraid of it," said Clare simply. "Love, and all it leads to—has led to."

"Father Benardino has made you afraid of it?"

"No; he has only made me afraid of sin, and the nearness of any great overmastering feeling to the impulses of temptation. I should be sure to live without sin here—that would be peace."

She was such a frail image of utter sadness her mother could not argue or laugh her into a more normal mood. She appeared to entertain the plausibility of such a career, and yet to merely suggest the objections for Clare's later deliberation.

"If your whole soul becomes set upon it, you shall not be prevented from any course you wish; but if you are merely seeking a refuge, from what do you wish to escape? You must not yield to sick imaginings; that would be treating the religious life without respect, and Father Bernardino dishonourably. Leave it all aside till you are your own, brave self again, then we will encourage or discourage his hopes for you according to your own dictation. My loneliness shall never stand in the way of my child's peace, my only child."

"I should lose you and find you both——" stammered Clare.

"You would lose your other great mother, Nature, too."

"St. Francis did not; he so lived that he was called the Pan-Christian."

"But he was roaming over these hillsides, and earned his title from his open communion with nature. He was out on the highways of the world, though not of it, while you would frequent only the high-walled garden of some grey convent. You

would lose the exquisite companionship of remorseless sunsets whose beauty hurts you now, but is half the charm of life; you would never have the comradeship of the road again or hear the tides of the sea calling you. The little spring rains will scent the air with fresh earth and lilac bloom for others, not for you; the 'midsummer pomps' will pass you by unheeding."

Clare drew a long quivering breath.

"But out in the world I shall only be an onlooker all the days of my life! I shrink from it and all its associations as you can never guess. Spring evenings will never again mean lovers' meeting—never; no more than the scented moonlight nights will mean love."

She stopped short as if dazed by the robbery of her secret treasuries of joy.

"Love need not wait for spring evenings," began the older woman, feeling her way with caution toward the subject she had nearest to her heart. "Clare, you know what I mean—can you leave Lloyd altogether out of your decision?"

Clare covered her eyes with her hands and held them there.

"About Lloyd don't ask me yet! Not yet. You have always trusted him, mother, do you still?"

"Absolutely; and I have thought you did also,

until recently, when some slight alteration in your relation seemed to have taken place."

"Yes, you are right, until recently——"

"Dearest child, try to be frank with me, if you can! Have you made any promise to Father Benardino? Has he oppressed you with any secret sense of obligation in these matters?"

"None," she answered. "And we have never talked definitely of my future and its disposition. He has made me feel and understand what he expects of me, and almost made me hope as he does. I have waited to be sure of myself, but I am only sure that of all men, he alone is interested solely for the salvation of whatever is left of my best self. He is more than human; lower considerations have no weight with him. I can trust him, I can rest in his decision for me when I am unfit to choose for myself—and dare not leave it to others who love me too well, perhaps. He never falters from his ideal for me; it is higher than my own; it may lead to such blessedness as he prophesies—at least he himself has chosen such a life and found it so after greater tribulation than mine."

"Lloyd is capable of ideals equally high and unselfish; he is a dear noble fellow, and fitted to give a woman the happiness I have known, and you, dear, alas! have missed."

"In a question of conscience happiness may not intrude. Father Benardino bids me decide my life without reference to what the world outside the cloister may hold for me. I am trying to fix my eyes only on what lies within; it is an absolute, not a comparative matter."

It was unsatisfactory to talk with a shadow between them. Already the mother felt the vague elusiveness of Catholic reasoning rising to part them, a something in her daughter's mind that had not come to the light because she had not wished it to do so. It was the first deliberate exclusion Clare had ever practised against her, and its import worried her less than the influence sufficient to create it.

"If there is comfort for you in the church, dear, I should only be grateful; but now that the external conditions of your life are changed, I want you to consider what you may do with your life outside Umbria, in your own world. Your own influence that you may exert," she urged gravely.

"What has my influence been in the past?" interrupted Clare, with bitterness. "To what has it led where I tried hardest to exert it? What has it availed but evil?"

Mrs. Reynolds would not say, "You have your mother," as a more selfish woman might have done

in her place, she wanted Clare's decision to be unbiassed by any consideration save of her own choosing. She felt sure the generosity of the nature she so trusted would prevail.

"Don't decide anything yet, little girl; there are a good many long years before you. Day is not over at ten o'clock in the morning, even if it rains; the later hours are often hoarding a wealth of beauty and enjoyment in their keeping."

Seeing that the younger woman withheld her confidence, the older woman temporised again. Procrastination may be the thief of time, but it is the saviour of kingdoms more often, as she was well aware.

That the priest had gained an ascendancy over the lover for the while, and that nothing was to be gained by discussion, was too apparent.

For some reason, a distrust of Lloyd had sprung up in Clare's mind, yet with the contrary impulse of womankind, never had she seemed so to lean upon him, so restlessly to anticipate his footsteps, or so coldly to repel his most natural expressions of solicitude for her recovery.

Poor Lloyd! The hope in him sometimes seemed a living torment that was cramping his heart to death. He often felt there could be no happiness until the dumb resignation of death had stilled his

ath forever. Yet she was near, and every day grew nearer to him, though her eyes protested he looked a shade too warmly within them, and dared not broach the least of his perpetually nourishing thoughts, so finely did her attitude toward him mark the border line of her reserve.

Sometimes he felt she wanted him to snatch her from herself in spite of herself. At such times the traint he put upon his desire hurt like the binding of cords about the bare nerves. Yet they were quiescent while she was allowed to make her decision alone of her own free will and that of the supernatural Jesuit.

When Lloyd had asked Gertie after her talk with aunt concerning the plans of the party, she had shyly shaken her head in profound dejection.

'You think the priest is making progress?' he inquired hopefully, from her manner.

'No; he has not got her yet.'

'But what is he doing with her? Will he get her in the end?'

Gertie picked her simile from a familiar figure Assisi, replying, as she spread her hands in imitation of wide hovering wings:

'No; he has not got her yet; he is still circling circling—like the hawk. I don't think he has succeeded yet—we have not given him any chance;

but he will make a great swoop in the dusk before long, and when he does, the fox will be an honest, daylight fellow in comparison with him!"

It was a time of intense discomfort to them all, while the soul of Clare shrank from its performance of duty as represented to her by the inscrutable priest, or leaned toward it,—as reaction after reaction carried her toward or swayed her from the world-forgetting of the Umbrian convent walls. The door of death might be walled up never so permanently in those devoted hearts about her, but the door of death-in-life was unhappily open wide. And in Clare's memory rang her own words now: "I said 'if he was dead,' and he is dead; but by whose hand?" No one had raised a conjecture. Who could, save Father Bernardino, who would not disclose a secret heard in confession; the dead man himself, or the guilty soul that had yielded to its insane impulse without a moment's thought for the hereafter?

CHAPTER XVI

BENEATH A COWL

ILLNESS had left Clare with the fragility that was alone wanting to complete her charm in her happier days. Her spiritual face was very touching in its loss of bloom. The contours of her cheek and chin had grown strangely appealing. Assertive femininity had supplanted her lithe, boyish grace. Something of the old-fashioned heroine that used to reach the hearts of manly men, and for which they still confess a weaker inclination when safe out of hearing of their wives, clung about her in her convalescence.

The self-reliant, modern woman, with her appalling list of capabilities, is undoubtedly the most consummate gift of God to man; and yet, so inconsistent is this same male masterpiece in its Creator's image, that at core he is even yet the savage; longing to protect and rendered deplorably vulnerable thereby to the frail, eternal feminine with its unintentioned demand upon his more rugged or untamed vitality.

Upon the two men who watched her with tyrannous interest, the effect was much the same. Lloyd

felt himself in the lethargy of some sickening dream, powerless to cry out for help. He waited as by the bed of one mortally stricken; hope was not over, but benumbed. Effort such as he might endeavour was unavailing. Prayer he construed to be divinely inspired action; and what action of his could restore at the present crisis?

And as her strength flickered, now braver, now weaker, did the purpose of the priest grow confident? Did he dream of Clare's soul and his own united in a mystic friendship like unto that of Santa Chiara and St. Francis of old—the same fasts purifying them, the same feasts exalting them; the holy sacraments partaken at the same moment, binding them in an intimacy of spirit beyond all that the flesh or time may devise? Limitless, changeless, eternal! Surely he would have been the first to deny, to agonise, over such a blasphemous accusation. A pure dream it was too, yet even such as this forbidden, nay, accursed, to the heart of a consecrated priest.

Yet how often the friends of Jesus, his example, were women! How many of His followers to-day are drawn by their holy memory! Who find in the Magdalen's act of devotion, as in the over-assiduous Martha's much serving, a radiant inspiration. Father Bernardino had often imaged

Clare in the Magdalen's place. Her wonderful hair dazzled him as he searched the Scriptures, and shone upon him even as he prayed for her soul. He had once left the little group on the balcony of the *Evasio* when the American had asserted that every man had a Mary and a Martha in his own life. In his thoughts Lloyd was never designated by his own name; he remained "the American" merely. To this devout Catholic the sainted names were impossible to mingle with careless conversation. He had suffered over Clare's acceptance of the theme adapted thus to the modern life of more or less corrupt society. His mood had been nearer despairing than at any time since their first unsympathetic encounter in the cloisters so many weeks ago.

He was aware that her friends had left her on this especial afternoon—she was resting in her long steamer-chair under the dense foliage of the grapevines on the shadiest corner of the balcony,—for she did not yet attempt the stairs until her return to her room at night. Everyone respected her *siesta* there—the *albergo* might have been her private villa for all fear of interruption.

He was thinking of her as he rambled up and down the garden walk too absorbed in his meditation to regard how he was hindering St. Francis'

little "Sister Lark" in her housekeeping duties. Her bright eyes being continually warned to flight by this black monster who invaded her personal corner of the pergola where Beppo's dreaming fingers had left loose ends of string apparently destined by heaven itself for the reparation of her nest. It is very annoying to an industrious bird to just loosen an enticing thread and then be obliged to fly sidewise to any refuge and cling there with ruffled feathers and terrified heart until it is safe to return again to the pergola. Very destructive also to nest-perfecting, as well as strictly unnecessary, since the black thing could just as well have moved in other spaces and left only the grey cat to be avoided. She lay hours at a time in the dark myrtle leaves without so much as curling her tail to betray herself to her prey, but on the pergola she was easily seen, and but for this black-robed intruder affairs could move undisturbedly to their conclusion.

By all token the priest must have been aware of the passing season. His letters from the heart-of-the-heart-of-Rome queried deeper, took on an insistent tone. His book on the martyrs ought certainly to be ready for its final submission. Spring was already spent; he perceived to-day with amazement that the year;

“Weary of bloom began to live for fruit.”

ven the smiling garden of the Evasio had assumed more serious aspect. The childhood of the spring blossoms had fled. These Americans were a restless folk, their tribal affinities would call them; sooner or later they would listen and go. But not before she had convinced this girlish soul of its supreme need; not before he had opened her deep eyes to the glories of Catholic immortality and its sacred duties of preparation.

Much to “Sister Lark’s” approval, he left the garden at the cathedral end, entered the cloisters, lingered a while looking off over the landscape as so many a troubled soul had done before him, and finally entered the lower church and knelt silently before the great crucifix in the chapel of that name. And as he knelt, no invading angel blemished the whiteness of his petition by a hint of other prayers neglected in the stressful need of salvation for one woman’s hesitating soul.

When had he not prayed for her? When should he ever cease to pray for her? This one indulgence he granted himself unaware of its power over his most being. The conflict of the people and the spaciousness of old seemed about to be fought over again in her soul.

“I have laid my keys at the foot of the crucifix!”

he cried, as the Perugian of centuries ago; "now let the Pope, the Highest, the Infallible, enter, or the cross protest!"

He paced the lower piazza steadfastly back to the balcony of the *albergo* under the influence of his determination to speak to Clare freely of her vocation. The busy lark chirped a "*buona salute*" to him as he passed, the wall between giving her a royal sense of security and a good will toward his retreating form that wiped out all former misunderstanding between them earlier in the afternoon. She would sing to him from the top of the tallest of the trees at sunset; she knew his window well, for there were, oftener than not, crumbs upon the sill.

Clare was not asleep, and the gay Italian blanket thrown lightly over her clung to her soft outline lovingly and lent a bit of worldly colour to her white frock and whiter skin.

"Alone?" he asked, glancing about him as if to seek the little bodyguard that so seldom failed to encompass her.

"If one could ever be alone with such beauty, yes," she replied, designating the valley that already began to fill with shadow and sunset like some love potion of the gods in a purple cup. "I shall be alone with the spirit of beauty until I die,

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He went on softly, as if speaking to herself more than to him. "Always alone. I don't think God himself could bear it all without the beauty of nature, do you?" she asked wistfully.

"Nature and humanity," he supplemented.

"Life is all very mysterious," she sighed; "and all its mysteries come out in the same sad certainty. I crossed the sea and found only harbours like those left behind me; I married—" She shivered slightly.

"Religion includes all mystery, my daughter. It is a greater mystery than the sea or marriage or life itself, and it leads to God himself—the consummate mystery. Man, it is true, is alas! but a certainty."

"And how to be reconciled, how to understand?" she asked dreamily.

"You would not adore a God you could perfectly understand," he corrected. "To a Catholic, however, loneliness is unknown in the sense of dependence upon human beings, since there is always the radiant communion of saints, the joy of prayer, the contemplation of the Divine!"

His face glowed as he painted these sacred companionships to her listening eyes.

"It is easy to accept it all here, but since you last talked with me, Father Bernardino, I have been wondering if I went away from Assisi, and from you,

and from all these associations, if the life of a Catholic would impress me as it does now," she said.

"If you went from here a Catholic,"—how his face lighted at the thought,—“if you once tasted the blessed raptures of holy celebrations, it would be as if you had never left the Seraphic City!”

“But I have lost my faith in myself. I should miss your influence, your guidance to hold me to my ideal.” She dared not confess to him how inconsistent that element in her conversion must remain to her despite her certainty of his disapproval of anything so personal.

“Man’s humiliation is God’s exaltation,” he said reassuringly. “Loss of faith in self is the gain beyond all compare! If you went from me a Catholic there would always be two chapels where our souls might meet.” He hesitated before he added: “One is called beauty and the other prayer.”

“I dread to go——”

He was not slow to take the advantage thus offered him. Turning to her with both hands spread open as if in invitation, he asked her passionately, letting all the fervour of his faith rise to his lips:

“But why need you go at all?”

She was about to impose the commonplace reasons that had dictated her return to her own wor

when his face arrested her; she sat in utter silence waiting for his next words.

"Surely even you, yourself, must be aware of having found your vocation?"

The moments passed as they sat confronting each other in the unexpected suddenness with which the carefully suppressed had sprung to expression between them. Clare spoke first, saying simply:

"Why have you changed?"

"The unchangeable cannot change," he replied.

"But why would you never allow me to speak of a possible vocation before? I have told you so often that it was only for sake of the peace to be found in one of your Sisterhoods that your church could ever win me; I have told you how I fear the world, how unequal I feel to ever meeting it again, and you would not heed me. Why have you changed?" she repeated, as if waiting for his explanation.

"Your first duty was toward your husband," he stated coldly. "Living, you should never have deserted him, and in the church you never would again."

"From your point of view——" began Clare.

"From the point of view of the church, which alone could be the point of view of her ordained priests."

"And now that Count Variani is dead?" Her voice was that of a tired child condemned to still another task.

"Now that your husband is dead, and in so foul a manner, all unprepared, the church that was his more than ever before cries out to you to atone for the past. His very soul in purgatory perhaps depends for bliss or eternal torment upon your decision."

"You believe this?"

Her tone was awestruck.

"The church is founded on such belief," he said solemnly. "What more beautiful vocation could a pure woman crave than the right to constant supplication in behalf of a soul once part of her own by the sanction of God and His ministers, and afterward erring until it had lost the path toward forgiveness and must rely on her wholly for the hope eternal?"

"We never pray for the dead in our church—this is all a strange new way of feeling for me," she said slowly. "I thought of the Sisterhood as a refuge for myself; I did not suppose it was to bind me closer to my husband. It is at variance with all the teaching of my own church."

"A church without a day for the dead, though its religion professes to be founded upon the Resurrec

tion! A church that disregards the eternal efficacy of saints, the divine aid of guardian angels!" he exclaimed. "It is monstrous! At least to a Catholic," he added, "who daily experiences the companionship of the heavenly host."

For once the priest had broken through his habitual tone of calm superiority.

"You wish to unite me eternally with my husband?" she asked.

"What other end could the church design than to unite those whom she hath joined in her most holy sacrament? Oh, my child, read, pray, meditate, resolve!" he cried. "Let not your heart be drawn away from the paths of peace!"

"I have much to forgive Count Variani," said Clare abruptly. Her frail hands caught the arms of the reclining chair and held them as if for support against an unseen enemy.

"We have all need to forgive," assented the priest. "And even more need to be forgiven," he added sadly. "Very few of us want forgiveness, for it is but rarely a soul realises the magnitude of its own sin, though the sin committed against it is ever apparent."

"What is sin? What do you define it to be, Father Benardino?"

"Technically, sin is to step over the law—to miss

the mark is the Hebrew definition," said the priest. "The crucifixion of evil and the continual adoration of the purified desire is the ecstatic programme of a Catholic with a vocation. It drives out sin with rapture! It all lies between the soul and the altar; no human touch can tarnish the vision of the uplifted soul."

"It is exactly the solitude of the Catholic worship that so appeals to me," admitted Clare. "I have always rebelled over the curiosity of the Protestant Church toward my soul's welfare and its relation to its God. Mine has always been a very inarticulate soul, and I like supremely the Catholic reserve."

"It is not so much matter what you like as what God likes. We are nowhere instructed that the happy shall see God. We are taught only to ask Him that His will be done."

"But for me this phase of the church has an exceptional force——" she began, when he interrupted her.

"There are no exceptions in His sight," he reminded her. "There are only sinners seeking redemption."

"I rebel at that, too!" cried Clare. "That we are all so alike in His sight is the one thing I have never forgiven God."

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It was but a flash of her old spirit, and her face was oddly plaintive as she turned it apologetically toward him.

"You are not trivial in your virtues, do not be so in your faults," he admonished her.

"No one needs forgiveness more than I do!" she cried; "or peace, or guidance. I should like to stop thinking, and just follow implicitly in the performance of repeated acts of devotion that would set everything right—so many Aves and so many Pater Nosters, like so many faggots to bunch or so many rows to knit for the peasant women, who do not have to reason it all out and just confide their souls to the virtues of observance."

Indeed, she looked too spent to grapple with doctrine or man as she lay back and relaxed her hold upon the arms of the chair.

"If that is truly your attitude, my child, only confession of your sins can lighten your conscience." He was watching her narrowly now, but she did not give any sign of shrinking from him. "Know the full joy of confession, take the blessed sacrament, and your life will flow henceforth as a tranquil river toward its eternal solvent."

"But my mother—it would hurt her desperately, would it not?"

"She need not know; at least not until she perceives how you are recreated by the secret submission to the divine will!"

His excitement was under stern control, but the unevenness of his breathing revealed something more than fervour.

"Would it be right?"

She leaned toward him as if swayed by his outstretched mercy. While she hesitated he spoke again, rapidly:

"Oh, dear child, consider well before you turn back to the burning deserts of life from these cool cloisters! The way is so weary for wandering feet! The mirage that cheers for an hour is but a deception of natural laws! There is scant shade for the eyes that are burned with their own tears. And what refuge for the unsatisfied heart when the desert city is reached at last? Men and women hurrying confusedly toward they know not what. Barter for temporal gain that will not endure. Deception, disappointment, clouded ideals—and after all, death. Death, not as the supreme victory over self and the grave, but as a tyrant held at bay only so long as the resolute flesh has power to resist, but overcome at last by creeping dissolution. The soul humbled by the overmastering body in total contradiction to the will and intention of the Almighty

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One pities the Creator for the shame unto which the work of His fingers has descended!"

"But could I fit myself for the religious life? Would it not demand more than is left in me?"

"God does not require more than we can perform," said the the priest.

"I could work for the poor, I suppose, until my spirit reached a proper state of docility; but honestly, Father Bernardino, I should shrink from it at every contact. Religion as a sort of trance appeals to all that is poetic in me, but my taste would die hard long after my will had received its orders from my vows." He did not speak, so she continued: "I suppose a Sister would naturally love dirty children, and consider the sick and repulsive a special source of grace. There is much besides this, too, in the Catholic life that would offend my taste."

"Our tastes," said the priest gravely, "are our last surrender." He was so true an aristocrat of God he did not evade. "Our Master ate with publicans and sinners, He even touched the lepers and frequented such places where those most nauseously afflicted could press about Him and touch His robe."

Clare drooped perceptibly.

"Does a Sister necessarily go among those out-

side? May she not devote her days to prayer and meditation worthily?"

The priest shook his head emphatically. He would not show favour to her; she must submit wholly if at all.

"The Son of God abjured the starry wastes of heaven, tormented body and soul, for men; the day of His true follower must bring again and yet again the daily dying before a soul escapes to the baptism of oblivion in nature or in worship. The exclusive pursuit of piety is just as selfish as devotion to any other art."

This was an uncompromising presentment; her reflection upon it left her outside the walls once more unconstrained by such penance.

"And outside the cloister? One may live a sanctified life outside an order—the Virgin did," she said stoutly.

"Woman's supremacy is eternally assured in the Holy Virgin," he said, crossing himself. "But you are not a woman to lose yourself in the service of little children. You have too much of the celibate in you. If sex had been equally implanted with sainthood in your breast, the poor sinner whose deathbed we so recently shared would be living at your side."

The implication was impossible to ignore. He

thought her only fit for a Sisterhood, then, because she was less animal than was the Italian race, whose women were presumably the only women he knew to reckon by.

“Every woman is a saint when she looks into the eyes of her own child,” she mused irrelevantly.

“You have no child, you are yourself little more than a child! A child whose beauty and innocence are a fit sacrifice to the Crucified. Who would wish to keep you from so fair a vision?”

He raised his own gaze heavenward, but Clare had pushed her rug aside and sprung up with her old familiar motion, putting back her veil of hair from her brow as if it meshed her thought from clearness.

“Lloyd!” she cried, half frightened at herself for pronouncing his name at such a point in their conversation.

The priest gave a well simulated start of incredulous horror, which he feigned to control with equally well simulated success—but which was not wasted upon her observation.

“Such a contemplation ought not to rest in your mind an hour. How is it possible after——” He paused, as if restraining himself with effort.

“But if I loved him, how could it be wrong?”

“If you loved him, you would have gone to him

right or wrong," he warned her. "The fact that you love someone else, or some ideal better, has held you here—does hold you still. Oh, my child, be warned! Do not hesitate between the open doors!"

"You said once that I should find a convent monotonous," she suggested. "Do you remember it? What has changed you, Father Benardino?"

"You, yourself. I was mistaken in you. I have watched you week by week, until I have become instructed in your need better than any other wisdom save that of God and my Order. I have come to feel that the world is no longer safe for you; that evil of which you need never dream is waiting to encompass you. No, no! Outside the church there are ravening wolves; they must not devour the tender lambs of the flock! I believe in the conventual life only when a woman has sinned or suffered until she can find no peace outside. I like human beings to be happy; and what a terrible thing for any poor creature to enter a convent in a moment of spiritual exaltation or impulse, and when the mood died to find herself hopelessly imprisoned for life! Nothing should be ventured in a moment of excitement. Conviction, not impulse, should govern all choices in life."

"But the visioned moments, the soaring, that test of our capacity to rise above the finite living—

you count these worthless, untrustworthy?" she asked, with disappointment in her voice.

"No. I believe in moods of exaltation. I go straight back to Nature, where the strength of consummate force binds the earth together, over which the roses and vines clamber in beautiful profusion—the rainbows and roses are as necessary a part of the whole as the strength and darkness. In matters of observance each soul must find its own expression; each soul may be appealed to differently, there is a spiritual mystery and support for all." He paused as if conscious he was speaking to her as an equal, and, noting the intent interest of her face and close following of her mind, continued eagerly: "There are in the Catholic communion two classes of men—those who read and those who think. When I was younger I went by the books because I was afraid to think anything that was not given me by my superiors. Again, there is one class of subjects on which a man may think and another on which he may not. The dogmas of the church any man of my communion must accept or leave; he may not use his own will or discretion. In matters of personal emotion, morality, or life, he may to a certain extent formulate for himself." He turned toward her with respect for her sagacity in his whole bearing as he explained himself still farther: "Talk-

ing to a woman of your brain I freely admit this: to those I teach, I say, I am God's instrument ordained by the direct transmission to teach you. I say, *This is truth*, and you must accept it. To them the duty is only one of obedience. Oh, but under your questioning eyes the thoughts and desire to speak freely rush over me as when sometimes I am alone at my desk or among my books! My dear, we shall meet yet in the holy communion! There is much for me to give, much for you to receive."

"But if I try," she faltered. "If I begin and then cannot lose myself in religion; if I come to feel that I am false and it is false? Oh, what blasphemy I am uttering!"

He was very patient with her confusion.

"Even a false religion is better than none, as has been often proved. Trust God, my child; you have every grace but His; add this, and offer yourself at the lowest step of the altar, unafraid. I will guide you!"

The promise was of unearthly sweetness as it fell on her exhausted ears.

"And Lloyd? What of his soul?" she asked.

A glance of something quite human darkened the Father's eyes for a flash, and died before he spoke.

"Of one husband the church is cognizant," he

said coldly. "The repentance of a heretic such as he should not sully the first awakening of a soul like yours by its shadow."

"But why do you speak of him as if he was a lost soul? He is outside your communion, but he is not necessarily a spirit of evil. You condemn him very harshly, too harshly——"

"To a priest the feeling cherished in that man's heart for a married woman before the death of her husband is strictly a sin—even the breaking of one of the most holy commandments. Beyond this I will not speak. He is my brother. I may not judge him."

As he was about to withdraw he made the sign of the cross over her and murmured a benediction above her bent head.

"Trust me, my daughter, and I will lead you home," he said as he left her.

She followed him with her eyes a few steps, undecided, then with a frightened haste she called him back to her side again.

"If you really believe that,—about Lloyd,—and all you have said to me this afternoon, I will try to accept your choice for me," she said. "Give me a little more time only to reflect——"

"Do not reflect, only come!" he besought her; but she drew back protesting.

"No, I must tell my mother, and accustom her heart and mine to the idea."

"Do so, my child," he assented warmly; "and never forget that the door of my confessional invites you day and night to fit your soul for all which you can but faintly conceive!"

Again he blessed her. The shining head bent upon her breast to receive the first recognition of the mighty institution that had sought so faithfully and relentlessly to save her from the perils visible to itself in the love of earthly friends and home and native land.

Clare stood where he had left her without a glance for the returning carriage that was slowly winding its way up the hill from the plain. She was very pale, for she had not missed the insinuation of the priest against Lloyd; confirming her own worst, shadowy dread. Nor was she unaware of the importance of the step she had taken in the brief interval between the hour of her awakening and the present moment.

"Sister Lark" remembered her even-song, and from the highest branch of the tallest olive was uttering her "Ave Carrissima" with just the same inspiration as if the stolid human beings about her had not been too deafened by the noise of their own heart-beat to look up and join her tiny carol of praise.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ADVICE OF THE DISINTERESTED

LLOYD'S temptation to kill Variani and put him out of their path forever had been none the less vivid in view of his practical common sense. Fair play would have led him to choose an open fight, and even that would have seemed to him theatrical a few months before. Italy with her hot blood must have insidiously inflamed his cooler passions; the swift mad ways of her sons and daughters come upon him unconsciously with the enervating air; the troubling breeze half sleeping where the olives tremble, but are never wholly at rest.

Truth had been his shibboleth. He had loved Clare with the same clear detachment that he had employed in all his varied life occupations. His down-sittings and up-risings had been temperate. His temperament had never challenged his habit, and habits, as Balzac declares, are the children of celibates. But all that was in Summerfield. Summerfield, with its long shaded streets, where the measured precision of day following day was never

shattered by the jagged events of the heart, or the blood fevered beyond normal control. It was in Summerfield, in their youthful holiday periods, that he had chiefly known Clare. Summerfield, where one saw the scythe gleaming amid the rushes and clover,—a peaceful lyric of midsummer days,—while in Italy one saw but too often the blade of a dagger in swarthy hands, tried against a girl's long hair may be, to test its ready mettle against a coming emergency, the owner nodding a lazy approval of the result.

Beppo's voice as he had sung his constant repertoire of love songs above his cabbages, lashing the distant air with the endless repetition of "io" had set Lloyd's nerves a-throbbing perhaps. *Amore, desiro, addio* jostled each other's vibrations wearisomely, and like wind among the leaves there seemed to whisper in his brain continually:

"Sweet, how sweet were the sinning—
'God, if it were not sin"!

A subconscious reminiscence of some Frenchman's effusion that he had scoffed at when he heard it, as decadent stuff fit only for the exotic Gaul and his followers.

He remembered by a queer opposition, too, how in his boyhood visits to Summerfield during the

Winter season the local choir had sung on the Sabbath:

“As pants the hart for cooling streams,”

when the mercury was below zero and every brook frozen over. He had kept himself awake then, following out the figure to a vain, unimagined conclusion. He knew how the hart panted now, he knew by the gasping breath and thirsty longing within him that must almost cry aloud for Clare's pity. Yet he could not speak. What odds were against him! And most of all, her own unapproachableness, that seemed to silently warn him away.

An antipathy often lives on careful nursing that would die a natural death if neglected. Such had sprung up of late between him and the priest. Here was the Jesuit at every turn. A saint, no doubt, but willing, nay, resolved, to ascend yet higher in glory by drawing this frail woman away from all that was natural, therefore best. A saint? Yes; but how many a male saint has trod his way firmly to canonisation over the prostrate form of some gentle woman? The unseen woman who gave her own life to the perfecting of another? In the household of a saint there are apt to be those saintlier whose diadem is unproclaimed. All the world seems to derive its satisfaction from different forms of

egotism. Love, religion, renunciation, suffering, joy,—are not only all under the hallucination of some especial preferment which helps their daily satisfaction in whatever circumstances they are placed? Goethe and Trappist alike?

Sometimes Lloyd would have wrenched himself away and started off for “anywhere out of the world,” so sickeningly the conviction grew in his soul that both art and nature, which she loved so profoundly, were matched by religion in impersonality, and that in her present mood the church might fold her unresisting, half inanimate, within an embrace from which nor life nor love could wrest her evermore. If he failed to reach her now, she who was all nature-worship and sacred romance in her reaction from the profanity of passion tasted and condemned, toward what would she so inevitably turn as the mysticism offered her by the priest through the instrumentality of his faith?

To watch that sweet, young body shrivel to the mere tenement of a lovely soul, behind convent bars? To imagine the ardent nature of a loving woman pouring itself out in unnecessary fasts and weary vigils; to wake and stare up at the stars and wonder if the woman one adores will use the night for countless rosaries in mitigation of uncommitted to see a wall of mystic conventionalities imm

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her; to see hope fade to resignation, joy pale to calm? Oh, the agony of it! The wrong of it! And yet what reason had he to think that God would hear if he cried out to Him for help?

Had he been such a son as even a merciful Father would be likely to reward? Many cigars burned themselves out and left a definite determination un-reached. Why should he consider himself a goat consigned to the left hand of righteousness, after all? Why was a good goat to be condemned if it was by chance not born a sheep? Then within his undaunted breast would ring his watchword: If the sentinel within cries all is well, whom shall I fear? and courage would come back again.

Let the priest employ all the sorcery of the Sibyls, the black art, and the sacred mysteries, marry Clare he would or carry her off thousands of miles from the seat of her sick fancy. He would not admit it to be more.

If she had loved him, it would have been easy enough to rout this sudden weakness of hers,—of late he had thought she fancied so herself,—and yet misgiving told him that Father Benardino was no common religious, but a man whose manhood had been denied, never smothered—even perhaps as a hungry tiger, grown dangerous through this very self denial. His own love was so sane, so un-

shadowed, it seemed to him it must bring her the breath of the home wind she needed to invigorate her drooping soul. Let her but hear the robins in the old apple trees again, let her smell the old-fashioned odours of phlox and bitter peony, and these sickly Italian fervours with their muffling scents and unreal beauty must give way to the homely sweetness of natural living.

Yet again misgiving whispered to him that a woman's soul was not always to be refreshed by birds or fragrant bloom. He realised that one quality she possessed of which men would never tire, however their fickle roving hearts might tire of all else in a woman, her soul would still elude them all. Aloof, unpossessed, but always luring with the deathless lure of Keats' immortal shepherdess:

"She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss—
Forever wilt thou love and she be fair."

There was no mere human man who could ever compass her spirit. Her horizon would always be spheres on and in that vague nebula; what but the aromatic influence of the intangible communion of religion could hope to win her?

So the days continued to drag by, and the nights were short for the peasants sodden with sleep,

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to the wakeful ones upon the hillside. At
t, Lloyd's jealousy comforted itself in remem-
ing that no priestly influence could touch the lady
is order, the Poor Clare of his dreams. But
· all, prayer is hypnotic, and if she lent herself
· to the Catholic faith, what forces might not,
at this dead hour of ghosts and graveyards, be
ring her soul, invoked by the priest from out the
restitious, blue firmament above her?

re stars are new creations here at Assisi. They
l and move and throb, and ever and anon one
ches itself from its orbit and slides down the
zon so deliberately one could feel a sense of
lute loss when it disappears. Stars of Italy,
s of Dante, of Petrarch, of the greatest
-lovers of all time, grant a woman to a
who invokes your aid from your spangled
ses!

With the supernatural, the star-gazing lover felt
self wholly unable to compete. Prayer is a
! that enters not only the chamber of one's be-
d, but her soul, without need of hindrance, at
s all unseemly.

vain the lover chafes at the haughty stars
will not vary their shining revolutions to give
daylight and the sight of her he loves once
e. Ah, bitter to the soul outside is the com-

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swallow does not make a spring), "as the Italians say."

She made her quotation in a painstaking voice, then veered without warning to her original intention of attack.

"Lloyd," she began abruptly, "there is something I have been wanting to say to you for some time, only I was afraid to begin."

He smoked for a while, looking straight over his pipe as if his own thoughts were imaged there against the hazy background.

"I suppose from that form of preamble, it is going to be very disagreeable," he suggested dubiously.

"No; it is disinterested entirely, but it is not disagreeable."

"If it is not about my smoking too much, go ahead! I am tired of that. Every girl I ever knew has taken a willing hand at it."

He meant to warn her off perhaps by his lightness, but she was not of the stuff that takes a warning unless it suited her own campaign.

"It is not about smoke," she said gravely. "I wish it was all smoke and would curl up to heaven and never come down—it is about Clare."

She spoke hurriedly as if fearing he would interrupt her.

"If you can't make her accept you now, Lloyd, you never can! Put it all in the remote future-conditional tense, of course. Don't be stupid! But don't shilly-shally and dilly-dally away your opportunity."

She was all impatience, and frowned at him from under her sophisticated garden hat that cried aloud on Assisi and its sombre garb. She trembled a little at her own plunge into the area of a man's forbidden sanctities, but as he did not rebuke her to silence, or go away, she continued her invasion where angels refused to precede her from timorous dislike for intrusion, looking straight off into the distant sky beyond the cresting hills for her inspiration.

"You would do anything for her; anything on earth she wanted. But she does not know now what she does want, and it is just your not knowing for her what she wants that shows you are not a part of her, and perhaps never will be. If I can only make you see it! only rouse you to the situation as it is!"

A long silence followed, broken only by the birds as they dripped down to the stone fountain, preened and bathed, tilted their dainty heads freakishly, cocked their roguish eyes, and as Gertie threw her hands out in a wide gesture of helplessness, escaped to the myrtles or the blue sky for safety.

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"You are the only person who can break this spell that is over us all," she moaned, "and you are afraid!"

Lloyd got up and deliberately followed a bird to its nest, parting the branches to assure himself of its exact location, unmindful of her cries. Ornithology had acquired an invincible attraction of a sudden, from which he tore himself with difficulty, to say enigmatically as he came back after a few minutes to the garden seat and audacious garden hat:

"Thank you for your advice, Gertie, and take a bit from me in return. When you set your heart on an object, don't choose the moon."

"Good advice," asserted Gertie seriously. "Only unfortunately it comes too late."

"Like most advice—that is, good advice," he agreed.

"No; mine is in time," she insisted. "Lloyd, this is no airy persiflage, somebody must speak! It is like being deaf and dumb and blind to sit here and see life go by like a Turkish woman from the window of the harem——"

"There is no such thing."

"Nor is there here!" she retorted. "We look out on nothing, and in on misery, and the days that crawl by, like Emerson's muffled hours, will end in a convent."

Lloyd's face was imperturbable. Her conclusion, that is her spoken conclusion, he had known before.

"If you will not compel Clare out of this somnambulism of hers, who will?" she exclaimed, irritated by his stolidity. "That priest is the incarnation of plausibility; he urges her to accept, resign, to drift hour by hour farther into what he calls peace—and I call death. You love her, and you deliberately sit by and let him have her!" She shrugged her shoulders with marked contempt.

"I don't think there is any imminent danger," he said gently. "Clare is better than the rest of us, but that is a long way from the career of an Umbrian nun."

"She is not worse or better; she is only different!" persisted Gertie. "And you are too dull to see the finish of all this lamentable waste of summer weather. '*Dolce tempo*' or '*cattivo tempo*,' it is all the same to you, but I am growing old and have not so many summers before me that I can throw them away on such wicked provocation!"

"The end will be that Clare will go back to Summerfield with her mother," inserted Lloyd. "That after all is her strongest tie."

"Yes, perhaps she will go back to Summerfield with her mother," mocked Gertie. "And the people

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will come to pity her, and stare at her, and she will begin without knowing it to miss Italy and the years intervening. She will begin to be romantic about the whole thing, and even Variani will sound like the lost chord in her astigmatic memory—a chord played at a distance with the discord slurred, you understand. She will hide all she is feeling from the people about her as from the dust of the village street. To those unchanged Summerfield beings, her manner will aver that it was all worth while—that she has loved and lived. They will go away feeling she pities them for their contented narrow sphere. She will make them feel, in short, what she will convince herself, that a disgraceful marriage was a blissful apotheosis. She will be so isolated there among their local interests that she will first struggle, then——”

“And then?” Lloyd’s voice echoed.

“Then come back. The priest knows it; he knows everything. I hate him!”

She had finished weakly, and tears are not argument, but those that rose in her eyes moved her hearer as no other eloquence could.

It was after this attack from Gertie that he pondered more frankly upon his own situation. There had been days of late, very near of eyes and far of speech, when Clare seemed to turn to him for a

strength, for a fortification against those other influences that drew her so imperceptibly. He almost felt her desire for his healthful guidance that led so surely and lustily away from the crepuscule of Catholic mysticism.

She had been a romantic girl, easily moved by the sympathy of her senses, but in the reaction from her marriage all that element, in the appeal of a man to a woman beloved, he felt to be useless now. If he asked her for herself it should be not when moonlight lent the heavy shadows of the garden a deeper gloom in contrast to the silver valley, nor when the idle strings of a desultory guitar from the distance pricked out an accompaniment to the voice of some nocturnal serenader, singing not the strains of "*Sole Mio*," or any of the banalities of the Grand Canal or Neapolitan cafés, but the sombre love songs of the grim and warlike Umbrian, sweet and direful too upon the moonlit air.

No, none of these opportunities, when Nature met the church with her own weapons of sense or beauty, could assist him now. All the life of the sense was gone with the Italian courtship still embalmed in her memory. Rather let him try his fate at high noon, when even Pan is sleeping and only running waters wake to preserve his repose, when truth is at the zenith, and both the lover of the

past and the priest of the future were powerless to vie with the openness of his entreaty or distract her heart by one vague shadow of aroused association.

Like all men of deliberate preparation, he was quick to strike, and once determined he lost sight of every doubt or fear that held him back, and rushed to meet his fate. He found her just coming from a morning spent in the crypt, and like any healthy, animal man he was obliged to subdue a desire to shake her for it, but concluded this preamble would be treating her religious vagaries with a humour disastrous to his long-awaited ordeal.

He blessed the chance that made the air so sweet after the dim dampness of the lower church. The sun never laughed more broadly, the children were romping gaily in the streets, and the dear everyday life intoned by birds and bees and garlanded with circling butterflies in mid-air, could not fail to make their captivating human appeal in enforcement of his own. On every hand, life glowed and shone. The peasants were eating and drinking with voracious cheer. The tombs of the saints within the crypt and the dusky altars had no part in this warm noontide of the living. How pallid it was in contrast to the colour of the outdoor world! The crops on the hillsides, the honest cattle munch-

ing their fodder, the wholesome appetite in one's own possession, heightened the impression of vital energy.

She gave a little sigh of enjoyment as the whole radiance of the hour came to meet her and covered her with its beauty.

They had taken the path up toward the upper piazza for sake of a longer stroll to the *albergo*, and the lizards were shamelessly drunk in the hot sunshine that all but blinded the Americans at first. Halfway up the deserted slope Lloyd stopped.

"Clare," he asked, "how long are we to wait on here? Life is just over there—" pointing northward. "Break this trance and come out with me to reality that will be like the daylight after that gloomy crypt."

"Don't, Lloyd," she begged. "Don't!" But she did not pretend to misunderstand him.

"I must. You know how I worship you, but you don't suspect how I die a thousand deaths to watch this accursed priest manœuvre you into a living grave."

"Lloyd, please don't, please," she entreated. "I am only an object of pity: an unhappy shade; a soul conscious of having neglected a sacred duty. If I had acted otherwise, what suffering I might have saved! If the church could help me save a

VOICE OF THE DISINTERESTED 345

from eternal torment by my faith and sacrifice,

I stop to think of myself or my own happi-

' Too much that is terrible has come from my
ng for my own peace already. If I can atone
is all, do not try to prevent me, do not try to
t me to elude my destiny! "

lightning flash seemed to strike to his heart
scorch him by its revelation.

Clare, you are too young!" he groaned.

The Virgin took her vows at three," she re-
led him gravely. "And Father Benardino
woman's supremacy is eternally assured in the
in's holy example."

nce Lloyd would have scoffed, but his ready
our was strangely lost to him now at the sound
er sad voice that outweighed the grotesque in
argument she was offering him.

o this was the Jesuit's trump card? Well, if
was his watchword, he would meet it squarely
for duty.

To whom do you consider your duty most
ing?" he asked her. "To the stranger you were
ved to marry in ignorance,—now dead,—or to
mother who bore you and who has given her
for you ever since, hour by hour? How can a
essional saint like this priest disregard the
est duty?"

His jaws squared in the familiar way she remembered.

"Mother has had life. She will have much remaining to her still," replied Clare. "Her life has developed to rich conclusions, and she would have only pity for me whatever cross I were to choose."

"And I? What cross do you choose for me?" he said without bitterness.

"Lloyd, dear Lloyd, don't break your strong life over me! I am not worth it!" cried Clare, turning her face toward him, illumined by the smile no man could forget, having seen. "So many women could be to you what I never can be: happy women whose illusions are still their own, women who are waiting to love their first great love. I should only give you something tarnished, something doubtful. Don't let me spoil your chance for happiness complete! Go away from Assisi. Forget the tragic and painful, and only keep in your memory the faithful service you have given us all here."

"Leave you to fight it out alone?"

"Yes, to yield or conquer according to my own strength of character."

He looked perplexed. Did she really understand him so little, value him so falsely?

"Lloyd, I must not let you stay. It is more than craven of me not to have sent you away before; it is cowardly—it is worse."

“Listen, Clare,”—and no one had ever heard Lloyd’s voice like that before, tense but shaken and unsure,—“you are my fate. In this there is no place for will; either yours or mine. There may be other women in the world ideally qualified to make my happiness or salvation, but I shall never know it. I shall never be aware of any other woman but you. I lost you once; I loved you better lost than I could love any other woman won. Before law and man there is no longer any impediment between us, and before God I swear I shall never be the one to put it there! My life is yours as my love is yours, and, as I have always prayed in my dumb way, that my death might be. The Almighty has been kinder to me than my wildest hopes; your husband is dead, and the sun of the living shines on you and me in the world of the living! It is fate, I tell you. It is not a question of happiness. You may wound me, try me, ruin my life, crucify me, but it will always be you alone out of all the world for me!”

The gathering light in his eyes culminated and broke against her glance, holding her for an instant close in an unguarded nearness, appalling by its sweetness. She was swept along as much by the still passion of his face as by the power of his words. When he gave her an opportunity to speak she could only say brokenly:

"You will always be held close in my prayers."

"That will not suffice me. You are naturally a ritualist at heart; the spirit and presence may fill your dreams of ideal union, but I am a man and must desire the actual communion of flesh and blood, the bread and wine of life tangible and partaken together as is our birthright."

He would have her accept from the start that the motto of the ancient Saint, "*Non con la carne ma con il cuore,*" was not for him.

"I am not fit for a spiritual betrothal; I want the right to take care of you and put the bloom back on springtime before your dear eyes," he urged.

"But I have been another man's wife, how could I give myself again?"

She had thought aloud, and a mighty blush of sudden shame covered her with a transient glow, as when the setting sun has kissed the Jungfrau to humanity and the pure white vision is instantly alight.

Lloyd, noticing her confusion, remained with downcast eyes until she recovered herself.

"I could only give you my worst," she said timidly. "My weariness, my shrinking from life—a better gift to the pitying Mother of Sorrows than to you!"

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“Clare, if you are so foolish as to be thinking seriously of the Catholic Sisterhood, stop it!” He put sentiment aside now with the shake in his voice, and talked to her as he might to a child. “Once away from this Jesuit, it will all take its proper relation again, become a sick fancy—incomprehensibly real at the time, but vanishing with the fever that brought it. Count Variani is dead. What can it avail you to bury yourself in his grave? If he had been ‘right in the one thing rare’ I would not speak as I do.”

“It is because my husband is lying in his grave that I should remain,” she said firmly. “I need counsel and the control of a higher wisdom like that of Father Benardino to direct me—to help me expiate the past.”

“You would have none of his counsel that strengthens you now in your daily talks; there would be no intercourse possible between you save through a confessional. Take away the master spirit from this enterprise, and what would you have left?”

“Father Benardino says there are two chapels where our hearts might always meet; one is called beauty and the other prayer,” she answered softly, as if recalling more than she revealed.

“There are two others equally wonderful and a

world more sane," cried Lloyd. "One is called duty and the other truth!"

She sighed wearily as if her recent weakness made argument beyond her present strength.

"I know you would do anything and everything for me, Lloyd. I fear the overmastering impulse in you that never calculates the cost to yourself; but there is only one man whose insight is unprejudiced, and whose vision for me is absolutely unclouded by mortal considerations. For him human arguments do not exist. And to him my life seems necessarily spent here in some consecrated manner. He is incapable of being swayed by our earthly follies. I feel that he is convinced I shall be doing wrong to marry, and most of all to marry you; as if I were adding to the sins of the past instead of atoning for them."

"He tells you this?"

Lloyd would not insult her or lower himself by open recognition and denial of the accusation implied, but he could not keep the contempt wholly from his voice. It occurred to him that the priest had sufficient weapons in his power without the covert distrust of himself which he had evidently not been averse to implanting in her mind.

"Not in words——" She denied the challenge of his voice with her own, then wavered and pa

Lloyd waited; he hoped she would recant.

"I cannot make you understand how the loftiness of his thought leaves out mere personal detail. He only sees his end, and is gloriously sure it is God's end," she concluded.

"And a mere obstructing man or woman in the way of the sacrifice would not count?" suggested Lloyd.

"Not for any temporal happiness, not against the ultimate welfare of the soul, I think."

"Would a life together represent temporal happiness to you now? Am I presented as the vicious, because natural, alternative to the conventual life? If not, why do you treat me as if I were an incarnate temptation?"

He was trembling as he spoke, but his voice was even and modulated now.

"I hope not, if it involved a sin," she whispered with set lips, disregarding the last appeal.

"Why do you drag in sin?" he protested. "I am not wholly evil. Of course I know I am no fit person to approach a soul like yours, but at least I have never concealed anything from you in my life—I am only waiting to tell you——"

"Oh, hush, hush! Tell me nothing more!" she implored as if panic-stricken. "I do not want to listen."

The lines about his mouth tightened, and he breathed as a man in physical pain.

"Leave me here," she begged. "I am not strong enough to say more to-day; some other time perhaps."

The man looked off over Umbria lying in the same patient attitudes of centuries, and gathered a new control from what he saw.

"Dear, I would leave you without one word of explanation or farewell if I could believe it was for your real happiness—or blessedness either," he said very tenderly, covering her frail hand with his own. "You know I am not boasting when I say it. But until your heart is captured by a romantic impulse and carried beyond all hope of return, I shall not leave you, for I do not believe your truest self wants to be left."

She did not resist him, and he went on pleading with manly patience, though he felt her reluctance was part of a cobweb of mistaken conscience hardly deserving of serious attention.

"You are being overpowered by another man's ideal. My own is just as high, only it is not the same. My will is equally aroused for your future, whether it is to be shared with me or not. I know very well that, once away from Assisi, there will be other strong arms held out to protect and cherish you; but it is for a great nature like yours to love,

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to submit to love, to struggle for the object of his love. Any other alternative will stunt your spiritual growth, which is a sin against God and man. If you were away from the chance of an irrevocable mistake, I should not urge my fault upon you now—nor would I here, if I felt you were entirely unmoved. Say you are indifferent to my devotion, that I am just as other men to you, and I will never speak again of this——”

She waited, but no answer seemed ready for him. The heat and silence of the noontime isolated them. The superb glare of heartless revelation.

“If you do not tell me this, how can I go away and leave you to carry out your dreamy, ignorant mistake?”

He said no word from her.

“Can you tell me so honestly, Clare? I am sure you cannot—honestly.”

He tried to raise her eyes to him frankly, but something made her dizzy, and, as the foundations of the Massisi seemed to crumble and sway beneath her, she steadied herself by the stone balustrade, and looking down at the lower church as if in her turn to find inspiration for resistance, she spoke at

“It is because you are not like any other man, because I do know your power and your reckless love of self——”

She spoke low but clearly, though he had need to bend his head to catch her meaning.

“You feel that? You do not shrink from feeling it?”

Lloyd's heart seemed to have stopped. In spite of the noonday heat he was aware of an excitement that chilled him from head to foot. Was it coming? Oh, powers of earth and sky, was it coming at last? He looked at her with wondering stare, as if her face had turned unfamiliar, and then closed his eyes as he said:

“Can it be possible she loves me? My wildest dream had only been to be allowed to love her! Clare, for God's sake speak! If you don't care for me except as a sort of older brother, tell me, don't hesitate to hurt me; I am yours to hurt if you will. Don't mitigate the severity of the rule of my order—I am sworn to the unshrinking service of my Poor Lady.”

The abnegation in his manner was undermining her; she fought it off with all her will.

“It is because I am afraid to care that I am doing as I am,” she faltered. “What right have we to happiness at such a price as sin? It is a for me to even hesitate——”

“What possible sin can you imagine to be before love and truth?”

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Have we truth between us? She did not ask it, but her heart questioned wildly. How was she to tell him the suspicion that had haunted her persistently, and yet whose existence she dared not recognise by so much as a hint of reality?

"You do not see the possibility?" she only asked, aloud.

"There is none."

"If I was sure——"

"Would you consent to come to life again?"

He wished the day was brighter, hotter, of a sudden.

"But no one can be sure, after all that has happened, and Father Benardino, who has the vision clarified by holy living, sees differently."

"Promise me that you will not decide hastily," he demanded. "I ask for nothing more now."

"For the present, yes—I promise you. Is that enough?"

She had forgotten her hand was still in his and drew it slowly away.

"For the present, yes, it is enough. I could not bear more."

But he bent and kissed the hand that was slipping from him on the bare palm, as a man might lift water to his parching lips amid the trackless wastes of yellow desert sand.

motion in the rhythmic swell of the deeper men's voices as they intoned the words habitual for ages to the sustaining of the faithful.

She was gravely sincere without thought of trifling with her religious sentiment, but the emotional side was overdeveloped in her, as in all artists and poets, and affected her cooler judgment in the temporary enjoyment of the hour. Her artistic sense was excited by the splashes of defiant colour that would pierce a window to fall upon some upturned face of a young priest, or touch the crimson or purple ceremonial robes of some bishop with sudden splendour, or join the bowing circle of all those who were genuflecting in unison as they celebrated the service of the High Altar.

She loved especially to come to San Rufino, for these unusual observances, delighting in the pomp of the ceremony, altar boys, bishops, priests, organ and high tenor, which was oftener than not Paolo. It all massed itself into an irresistible charm that was appealing to her with the charm of the sea when it calls to the restless heart to plunge beneath its green, transparent waves and find eternal oblivion.

Yet the sadness of it all enveloped her. She tasted the *extreme douleur* as she knelt or sat in the corner of some dusky chapel trying to shape or

formulate her life. She was realising now the truth of the statement she had once read, and remembered, that the moderate sentiments are those of pleasure; the extreme sentiments those of grief. She had never enjoyed as she had learned to suffer.

The exterior of this old sanctuary is attractive, whether seen solely for its intricate façade, its porch supported on mediæval dragons crouching, or over its own shoulder across the abbot's garden where the grape leaves wind their tendrils arbour'd tracery to soften the grim bareness of its walls. But now, when her heart ached until it choked her with the longing for love she had so briefly known, and so irrevocably lost, she craved the consolation of the church, and pressed in among the lamentably few worshippers that came to share the service there—to let herself go unrestrainedly, as the music sought her and swept her away. She wondered how far the church might console? If it could go farther than the common makeshifts with which the disappointed are wont to clutch at a renewal of life. If love was not to be her life, then it must be the church. With less, she could not make terms satisfying to her own demand. To her, compromise abhorrent. She turned from the harmless trities of the old life with its careless goals and warding pleasures; a nobler vision had b

her by the rapt churches and the tragedy of her own experience, removing her from her former associations. The persuasive personality of the priest easily won her to interest in the great principle absorbing his life. Its dominant note might easily become her own. He had often spoken of the Catholic life ecstasically to her; once she had asked him if this world, perfectly lived, might not be heaven enough after all, but he had responded quickly:

"That would not sufficiently dignify the sacrifice of the Crucified; eternity is the only worthy career for man since God has so honoured him!"

After such intimate contact with the inspirations of a life like his, her own could never merge itself again in the daily round of petty crises that go to make up a woman's life; something deeper in her called out to the thrilling vastness of the church as he represented it, nor did it call in vain. The summer had separated her from all that was not allied to the supernatural, more than she dreamed. Clinging to the trusted hand of Father Benardino, she felt herself being lifted over the gathering difficulties into a sanctuary of the soul and sense. To him, religion was all. He was a man unique, holier than any she had ever conceived; the way he appointed for her she must walk with confidence, if not with joy. His guidance was becoming more to

her than aught beside; the more she distrusted herself the more she reposed her confidence in him. If he willed her to share his life of feast and fast, she almost willed it because his vision was sanctified and undimmed.

He only offered her the wonders of his faith now, all the rest would follow, he assured her—there was no need for finalities. In the first flush of the convert's ardour, he would know well how to employ the power he had aroused. It comforted her to remember that he understood her need, and was guiding her; she rested in his care over her. The mystic rites of the altar of San Rufino went on before her and she was soothed; the sweetness of lost illusions were vaguely restored. If the personality of the priest mingled in her mood of peace as inextricably as did the early, undiminished charm of Variani, remember she was human, and our mortality is with our immortal moments mysteriously blended.

One afternoon, as the last faint wave of the Recessional faded and the church was relapsing into silent sanctity, she was surprised to find tears on her cheeks. Father Bernardino had seen her sitting motionless, half hidden behind one of the marble pillars, and came to her side as noiselessly as shadows that were succeeding the scanty shippers.

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"Oh, why will you not let the heaviness of this world drop from you!" he cried imploringly. "Why will you not let the consolation of the church give you the wings of the morning, that you may mount upward?"

Both heart and soul were overflowing too. She could not find any argument to offer. One question forever near her lips she dared not ask him.

"What other life so beautiful can you substitute as that perpetually offering itself in prayer and praise from sunrise to sunset in sacrifice and celebration? What ideal so appealing to the heart of a true woman as the vision of her dead love rejuvenated, redeemed, through her intercession?"

At this she did gather her courage and try to read his inmost desire for her, saying:

"Father Benardino, surely you have more reason than I understand to urge me unreservedly into the life you live. The man who died, was he your friend? Was he more to your heart than I have ever conceived him?"

The priest's reply was astonishing.

"He wronged me with the bitterest wrong one man can offer another when I was a mere youth. I have forgiven, as you will forgive. I would seal my lips now unless their opening were an unanswerable answer to your appeal."

Her smile was one of wonder and supreme satisfaction. He was all and more than she could have demanded of him—then why did she speak so hesitatingly?

“If——” she began, but did not get farther.

“Tell me all, my child; trust me!” Ah, who could resist him?

“If this is true then there is only one thing that holds me back,—it is in your power to remove it. You are the only being who can possibly know how Count Variani met his death. I want to know. I must know.”

“And the confessional seals the lips of a priest,” he said regretfully.

They looked at each other as they had never looked before in all the slow weeks of their almost daily intercourse. Clare, as if trying to read the secret immured behind his priestly mask in the eye of the vibrant man who moved her to his will; he, as if in giving her this opportunity to trust him for all, he waited for her consent to bliss or perdition. Their breath hardly stirred; body was forgotten the moment of spirit conflict.

The woman thought with incalculable rapidity before the words came back to lead them to the beginning of speech again.

“And yet, knowing all, your feeling remains

changeable that my life can only be fitly spent under your direction—knowing all?" she repeated again with emphasised insistence.

"My conviction remains unshaken that your life can only be worthily spent for Him who created it in all its beauty, a fit offering to Himself."

"Knowing all, your vision sees me surrounded by evil of which I only guess, liable to fall into the snares of ignorance, weakness and sin?"

"My highest wisdom demands you be folded beyond the reach of temptation or evil. Trust me, my child!" he repeated. "Where I have found all, you shall find all! Your own Cardinal Newman cried: 'It is not difficult,—one glimpse of eternity makes all else seem trivial'!"

A moment of awful solemnity fell over them. Then he was again pleading, protesting, promising, shedding the light of immortal hope around her as if the heavenly Lover stood incarnate at her side offering his cross to her frail arms, but pledging his own arms of everlasting love to help her take it up. He paused, and on the burden of his soul lay the weight of hers. He stood before it eager, fearless: the winning of souls was his profession, he could not shrink from responsibility that he was assuming as other men might.

"If knowing all,—you believe me bound to live

a life of especial renunciation, consider me worthy to undertake such a life,—I will trust your decision," she said.

All the blood had deserted her face, she was as the stricken dead as she accepted his unspoken answer to her half-formulated appeal.

"I cannot trust to my own," she stammered. "It is influenced by too many conflicting desires and impulses. I am haunted by a fear of evil I am powerless to displace."

He still held her eyes with his own.

"Will you confess now,—at once?"

His lips hardly made the words audible; she might have imagined he spoke them.

"No, not yet——"

"But when? To-morrow is a holy day. At sunset after the others have left the crypt I will wait at the confessional nearest to the chapel of the sacrament. The next morning will be the Sabbath, and you will come fasting to share the Holy Celebration at early mass. May grace, mercy, and peace await you there!"

"Amen!" she tried to whisper as he made the sign of the cross over her and permitted her to go from him.

Neither of them had noticed the figure close at hand behind the carven column, and if they had,

there was nothing in the outline of one kneeling *novizio* to distinguish him at a casual glance from any other. After Father Benardino had left the church, however, the young devotee rose from his sculptured rigidity and turned away through the choir, where the last beams of daylight revealed the face of Paolo, strangely unserene for one so recently rapt in prayer.

Clare found it difficult to meet the others as if nothing had happened. The tumult surging within her absorbed her faculties to the exclusion of all that transpired about her. She feared to remain silent lest she betray her momentous secret, and she hesitated to speak lest she disperse the sacred presence of those vivid moments of her apotheosis.

The evening was very long; it dragged like funeral coaches in a heavy dream. Clare was so distract that it was a positive relief to have them leave her alone with herself and the stars, and settle down to their dummy bridge indoors. How oddly the phrasing of the game came out to her through the open windows, she could hardly have defined; she heard it and did not hear it, was aware of its repetitions without admitting it to her own contemplations.

Gertie's game seemed to be oftenest played alone, and the excited tones of her rapid calculation after

each hand proved her a steady winner. She recognised the sound of her mother's fingers on the arm of her chair, helping her by their cautious drumming to some harassing decision as to the making of the trump, then Lloyd's voice gravely demanding in the exaggerated courtesy of the game's required parlance: "Partner, may I play?"

It was all so familiar, yet so remote from her to whom the life of the soul, infinitely removed from the touch of work or play, time or bodily existence, was unfolding!

Her eyes strained out through the soft harmonious darkness of the lucent Umbrian night for that "one glimpse of eternity" that was promised to "make all else seem trivial."

"So the Little Brother of Trilby is going in for a posthumous love affair between Clare and Count Variani!" exclaimed Gertie the next afternoon as she idled by the arches of the lower piazza while Lloyd puffed discontentedly at his perpetual pipe. "Well, we may have lost, but our consolation is that we have fought like men." She sighed in answer to her own disconsolate outburst.

"It can be truly said of you, Gertie, like that ineffectual lady in the Bible, that you have done what you could!"

There was not much mirth in the man's voice. He looked jaded, and jerked his matches so that they went out or set the whole bowl of his pipe aflame and obliged him to knock the tobacco out and begin again.

"I always despised that woman," said Gertie thoughtfully. "It is nothing to your credit to do what you can; it is what you can't do that is worth doing! And it is what I can't do that is breaking my heart to-day."

"Then it has nothing to do with any man," said Lloyd, purposely misunderstanding her. "You can do what ever you want with them."

"Apropos," she returned, taking the hint for a change of subject. "I have telegraphed Donald."

"Gertie!" he gasped, a genuine smile of pleasure lighting his set face.

"Yes, I have. Here is the copy, if you would enjoy reading it." She spread it forth on the weather-stained sill of the open arcade. "It is economical," she remarked drily, "and alliterative; also explicit."

Lloyd leaned eagerly over her shoulder. He never knew what was coming next with Gertie, her unexpectedness fascinated him. He read aloud now with increasing curiosity:

“Donald O'Malley, Shiprah, London. Regret, remorse, renew.”

“Gertie!” he gasped again. “And no signature?”

“I thought he would be quite likely to know who sent it,” she replied primly. There are not so many summer guests at Assisi as in some other locations from which it might have been dated—where the gaming tables are more openly spread and the stakes are less exclusive than women's souls.”

“Was it religion that led you to it or Assisi?” he begged, still unconvinced. “Or a dawning sense of innate duty?”

“All three,” said Gertie. “A concatenation of convictions. But it may not last, you understand. *Chi sa domani?*”

And with this vague satisfaction he had to be content, for she in her turn was ready for a change of topic in their conversation. After a few minutes' contemplation, Lloyd gave a long whistle.

“Wouldn't I have liked to see him when he got it!” he said.

They were waiting for Clare, who was on one of her solitary pilgrimages within the lower church. She must have found more of interest to detain her

than common, for the half hours passed in search of each other, and yet she did not return.

She had warned them not to wait for her,—she was intent on copying some epitaphs that had struck her fancy and might stay all the afternoon,—but they had nothing else to do, and, as they had reminded her, what would they be doing if they ceased to do this? All energy had departed from them, and the routine of their daily existence had attenuated till they were almost as indolently effortless as the Italians themselves. To-day, however, the altar boys who had gathered in readiness for the Vespers and Benediction had instituted a lively game of leap-frog under Lloyd's direction, and their swarthy throats overflowed at their own unprecedented antics while they dreaded the reproving chime that would soon put a stop to their performance. Gertie would have joined in heartily had she not stood a little in fear of Lloyd's authority being exercised to restrain her. She could take a rail fence at a neat hand-spring, and exulted in her boyish ability to throw a ball straight or ride her horse at anything,—gate, ditch or hedge-row. It was too hot for violent exertion, so when the interfering bell collared the Umbrian froggies, they turned away in quest of some shadowed spot in which to

smoke more pipes and wonder again why they were wasting their young lives in Assisi.

Clare had been copying the legend from one of the remoter tombs,—that of a certain Donna Blandula—“*molta amata*,” a perfect tribute to a dead woman, summing up all earth’s vanishing glories. She had mused awhile on the semblance of the dear, dead creature now returned to yellow dust, and was just about to grope her way back through the dusk,—for the day had been sunless and was full of the regret for springtime gone,—when a slight movement almost immediately at her side startled her.

Paolo it would seem had been counting his beads near her unobserved. He did not rise from his knees as she approached the end of the altar to pass by him and out into the crypt, but satisfying himself with one swift glance that the place was empty almost as this retired chapel, he looked for one instant straight up into her eyes above him.

“One instant, *signora*,” he whispered, as if intent upon his prayers. She had never spoken with him since that first day in the cloisters, long weeks ago. How famished his eyes were! How emaciated his handsome face! This was no peasant lad, with the pitiful, imploring fire burning in his brilliant gaze. The likeness to Father Bernardino Gertie had remarked forced itself upon her as she returned

glance, looking down upon him where the longer light upon his face gave her a sharper impression than any she had ever before received.

"One instant, *signora*. *Cara signora*, listen." He muttered always as if at prayer. "There is a secret you must know; yes, but never, never, will a Jesuit tell you. Do not move!" he cautioned her, for she reached out for support and almost laid her hand on his slight shoulders. "I will tell you—you shall owe life to Paolo who adores the least word of your heart, hoping nothing. A priest may not reveal the smallest sin confided to him in confession, but I have no desire to conceal from you what chance has brought to me. He did not wish you to know this. He wished your soul to be as little as possible distracted,—as open as possible to the future of your husband's lost soul. He did not wish you to risk another life possible. To keep you for the length he will not tell you. But it is not just that another should suffer the burden of your unfor-
giveness. Look, *signora!* This was taken from me that night. It was I who found him on the edge of the town and aided him to the hut where he commanded me to leave him." And he extended to her the crumpled negative of Bianca, smiling on her load of cabbages with Beppo standing proudly

"She will never see Beppo again, never—the Jesuit only can say where he is gone."

Clare shrank back; her imagination, pierced to the heart of truth by his words, had seen and realised all.

"Paolo!" she cried with dry lips, "how to thank you?" She put out her hand to him impulsively, but he did not unclasp his own, though the beads of the rosary were indenting his thin wrists and the chains seemed about to sever the swelling veins.

"I hate him, Mother of God, how I hate him!" he hissed between his closed teeth, always preserving his devout attitude. "And the other too, the priest; blood of the holy saints, but I shall burn for this!" he murmured to himself so low that she could scarcely hear him.

"But why do you become a brother against your will, then?" she asked softly.

"Because he willed it—the Jesuit," he replied even less audibly. "We are of one blood," he added significantly.

Clare's face, already blanched, was growing whiter. "Oh, poor boy!" she groaned. "Can't you set yourself free?"

"Death is doing it for me, blessed *signora*," he answered quietly. "One of the Madonnas in the chapel of the Sacrament looks as the *signora*; I

pray always and only to her for death. She will hear me soon. *Ave Carissimæ! Go!*" he added hastily. "*Addio per sempre; multa amata.*"

His voice breathed away in a sigh, and as he sank lower as if to continue his weary devotions she bent and kissed his hair. Surely God would be glad in heaven to forgive that spirit caress!

She made her way blindly to the door, too shaken by Paolo's confession to even salute Father Bernardino, whom she met at the outer chapels, going in toward the cloister. From his standpoint he was right; and from his standpoint Paolo had damned his soul to save her!

She noticed gratefully that the path to the *albergo* was clear, no one in sight to remark her agitation, and then she swiftly effaced the distance between her and her own little cell, shutting the door and locking it before she began to pace back and forth like a wild thing at bay.

She had strange reckonings to take with herself for these slow weeks at Assisi. She had all but taken a fatal step, ignoring the nearest and dearest claims upon her, despising the standpoint of common, earthly truth. She had been guilty of a suspicion that never should have been harboured for one instant in an honest, loyal breast—all in her blind acceptance of the priest's sublime integrity!

A storm of self-accusation swept over her, bowed her in its fury of self-reproach. Him she did not accuse. She recognised that he had merely desired with all the powers of his being to give her what he believed to be the one best thing,—by any means. That one possible “glimpse of eternity” making even the honour of a brother man “look insignificant in comparison.” He had withheld the truth concerning her husband’s end, but his motive was one his church and his order would both sanction and commend. She acquitted him nobly—yet if the warning had come too late? But no, human love had broken its leashing vow to save her; it was not too late.

Meantime several of the resident friars had been kneeling inanimate in their narrow confessionals, listening to the sins of the faithful. They were not startling in number or original in quality of transgression, these Umbrian peasants. A monotonous succession of formalities for the most part, tediously recurrent, that were patiently attended by the priests and recommended to the attention of the saints at their leisure. As the shadows in the church began seriously to lengthen, and no farther penitents came for absolution, one by one they quitted their cramped hiding places and passed to the various chapels to begin their intercessions, or out to the cloister be-

yond. The echo of their sandalled feet withdrawing were almost as noiseless as the fading of daylight from the world.

Father Benardino then, who had been for an unaccountable time kneeling in the chapel of the Sacrament, rose as he heard them depart, and slowly entering the nearest empty confessional he shut the door and dropped again upon his knees, but through the narrow grating, half raised, his glance fixed itself upon the direction of the great outer door of the crypt through which the light still sustained its struggle with the deepening shade.

Through this doorway she would come. He listened. Only the pattering of children's feet as they clung to their mother's skirts while she dabbed their brows with holy water from the adjacent fount, resuming her family cares after the completion of her absolution.

Other footfalls arrested his attention, but they were always receding. Nor did the penitent for whom he waited step as any one of these. It was drawing close on to the time she had chosen, or he had chosen for her; it was more than probable that she was already within the crypt, and lingering among the chapels under some pretext until the other worshippers should have left them or the gathering gloom cloaked her identity.

The sun, that had not shone all day, threw a fitful gleam through a near window and transfigured the fresco of Santa Chiara with her plaits of Titian hair and submissive mien—the loveliest fresco of the lower church. As suddenly a cloud must have covered the wayward flash, for the light faded and a deeper obscurity followed. The face of the painted saint that had been radiant was left down-cast, uninspired.

The church was practically deserted now. She must come at any moment. He began to pray, but no sound interrupted him, for through all his petition he was listening. He wondered if she might not have mistaken the confessional he had indicated to her: it was not probable, for she had chosen it herself. She was not a woman of foolish fears or unaccountable weakness, not one to fail from momentary indecision, or to falter at the last in any high purpose she had set before herself for attainment. A step close at one side made him drop his face and cover it for shame with his hands, for shame that he had doubted her, for utter joy that she had come! Now indeed he prayed without consciousness of aught save the one gift passionately desired of God, granted to the all unworthy servant of His crucified Son.

When the outburst of feeling spent itself, !

— his head, silently waiting. Then to encourage the accustomed intimacy and practice of the confessional he spoke the familiar words of the benediction, but no voice responded, and opening his eyes perceived through the half-raised grating that he was still alone. The step had been only that of some belated sightseer.

It was not late; he rebuked his impatience, reminding himself also of her utter absorption in whatever matter occupied her serious appreciation. Even now as he waited she might be preparing her soul for this initial duty by a rapt and solemn meditation, that lost account of time as those of the "Poverello" of Assisi were wont to do. He sought to reach and draw her spirit now by his own prayers, and almost forgot his anxiety in the fervour of his supplication. She had given her word; she would not step back. He was uplifted by his own certainty of her and his confidence in all he could give her through his church. A sound smote him—merely the jangling of the keys in the hand of the sacristan as he passed through the crypt at the end and out into the cloister at the corner. It would not be long before the small gates of the chapels were closed for the night, though the massive portal remained forever open. Again he scourged himself for lack of faith; this time not in her, but in God.

The Infinite had surely more than one day in His keeping; if it was not divinely decreed for to-day, to-morrow, at all seasons, the conversion of a soul would equally redound to His glory!

He waited now without prayer. Simply waited, tensely conscious of nothing else. If she did not come, what had delayed her? What circumstance had been sufficiently powerful to counteract the impulse of the afternoon before in the impelling church of San Rufino? Nay, ask rather who had delayed her! This sent his conjecture on new paths. His face grew less spiritual as he pursued one after the other to unilluminating conclusions. Of course she would not speak to anyone of her intention, and some trifling social demand made upon her unexpectedly by the Americans might easily have obstructed her, something from which she could not rid herself without the explanation she would not allow herself to offer, though forced to relinquish her desire. That was the solution; she would be very late in consequence, naturally, but she would come, and come doubly radiant for her escape from the stifling banalities of life outside to the immortal secret they were to share alone from all the world.

He could not doubt her; he trusted her hardly less than she had trusted him. Her need was great; she had no other future to wean her from that he

was opening before her, and in which he had sworn before the miracle-working crucifix to accompany her, step by step, up Calvary to the end.

He waited, white at heart. The shadows advanced in solid columns and lay down to sleep, the reliefs on the tombs were sinking back into the confused mass of the general gloom, when he was brought to his feet by the grating of one of the heavy doors on its hinges as it swung together, leaving but half the ponderous portal to invite the wanderer throughout the neglected hours of the night.

The day was gone and she had not come. A foreboding seized upon him almost convulsive in its despair; a profound conviction that neither would she come to-morrow—or ever. In his overwrought apprehension, it did not occur to him to kneel again and pray that the unfathomable will of God might continue to be done.

CHAPTER XIX

EVEN AS TOBIAS

MANY a time during the night that followed did Clare remember the romance of Guido de Montefalco, who prayed by day in order to watch the stars by night.

They shone like cloth of gold in a molten mass through the dark hours, a blurring of indistinguishable glory in the path of the Milky Way, beyond which others stood, individual and aloof in their solitary pride, leaving their satellities to twinkle in comparative insignificance.

From time to time one dropped and the sky neved paled in radiance to mark the loss of one more burn' out meteor from its spangled host. The intense blue of the vault of the midnight heavens seemed none the poorer. It was day before she turned from them; the morning star the only watcher discernible to wake with her, and that soon to melt the faint dawn flush suffusing the misty East.

Now she would sleep, for her decision was made and the struggle was over. She did sleep, as deliciously that the morning stir of the *albergo* not rouse her, or the voices on the balcony!

death her window, where the others had taken their idle stand against the heat and monotony of the day. There was no novelty remaining to spice their languid hours. The bloom had long fallen from the almond and peach orchards, the honeysuckle was only a memory, and the glossy myrtles boasted but their rich shining leaves, while the olives were like the rippling grey-blue of the sea as the breeze ran lightly over them, and the heat was luxuriant, but not as yet destructive to the garden. The birds were too busy to sing. Nature's laughing time was over and the work of ripening had begun in earnest.

Lloyd had yawned till he was lame, and the longing for effort and occupation grew to the dimension of positive pain. How he chafed under the purposelessness of the present existence, let any able-bodied man explain!

"You are restless, Lloyd," said Mrs. Reynolds, looking up from the photographs she was mounting. "You will be off soon, I am afraid!"

"Yes," he said abruptly, without attempt at concealing his lassitude. "I must get back, back to the effort of the world, though its achievement be reserved for better men. I can be of no more use here——" he began wistfully.

Mrs. Reynolds painstakingly pasted Sienna cathedral upside down and left the bedeviled struc-

ture standing on its head in her effort to cover her surprise and chagrin.

"Can't you do anything to amuse him?" she implored Gertie, who was standing with her arms crossed on her breast, looking in all conscience like the popular pictures of Napoleon at St. Helena.

"Why, yes, I might take him sight-seeing!" she exclaimed, with barren enthusiasm. "How would you like to climb, and climb, and climb, up into the tower to see the bell with the famous inscription?" she demanded of him. She swung her arms solemnly from side to side as she spoke, imitating the rhythm and deep voice of the mighty bell as she intoned the inscription:

"Sabbatha pango, funera plango, fulgera flango—
Exito lentos; domo cruentos, dissiper ventos!"

"Does not that inspire you?"

Lloyd continued unmoved.

"I would infinitely rather hear the ferry too' over the East River in the fog," he admitted ir-
vantly. "Hoarse and shrill, threatening and sc
—I love them all! I am a sad Cockney after
guess."

"You ought to see the bell," insisted Gertie!
"You will live in vain if you go back to A
without seeing it."

"I don't want to live in vain; I prefer New York," he explained. "But it is too hot to climb. The poem says the 'Excelsior' chap set the example through snow and ice. Propose me a cooler game, do."

"How do the tombs attract you? Just as an appetiser?" she suggested.

"I can't hoodwink myself into getting up an appetite for polenta and salad,—it would be an anachronism; but if you would promise me *fillet mignon* and *champignons*, for example, I might make a round with you."

Gertie's face fell.

"It is not like you to take the heart out of the day before eleven o'clock by talking about *fillet mignon!*"

Her voice was full of reproach. "As for *champignons*, I almost believe they are wicked; they must be—they would taste so carnal good here!"

"The cypress walk is always shady." It was Mrs. Reynolds who spoke.

"Buried too many hopes there with those poor friar duffers," objected Lloyd quickly.

"You are very, very idle," said Gertie suddenly. "I believe you are degenerating; that proves there is nothing in the theory of environment—you ought to be spiritualising every minute."

over. Only Mount Subasio rising in its austerity behind the steep olive terraces knew no change, Mount Subasio and the weather-stained church over which it kept its imperturbable watch. Lloyd spoke of the succession of the season half whimsically.

“‘The bloom is gone, and with the bloom go I!’”

he warned them softly; then, turning to Mrs. Reynolds, he would have spoken to her of his definite plan for departure, but for something in Gertje's face that held him back, something so valiant, yet so despairing, he had not the heart to follow the flight of the fickle cuckoo and abandon her to an Assisan summer.

The sensation of being at the mercy of real emotions was a rare one for him; it was getting too strong for him. Wisdom counselled retreat in a selfish chorus of skilful inducements.

“I don't see what you want lovelier than that!” Gertie brought him back again by her challenge, as she pointed to the hazy hillsides with their sleeping villages and the blurred blue-green of the valley. “It is heavenly! Anyone must admit——”

“Yes, but you know the ‘blessed damozel’ leaned out from the parapets of heaven!” he reminded her; “there is no accounting for personal taste, even in heavens.”

Gertie raised a warning finger.

"You may look back to this as the happiest heaven in all your life!" she cautioned. "We don't always know ourselves inside the parapet till we have fallen over!"

Lloyd winced.

"Why don't we get some nice girl to join us here for a while to keep Lloyd busy?" suggested Mrs. Reynolds again. It was no part of her equation to have Lloyd leave them in the Seraphic City, come what might later on.

"Mercy no! Where is your perspicacity?" cried Gertie. "No really nice man ever looks twice at a really nice girl! They are only popular with the thoroughly sophisticated men who find the mystery of innocence alluring by contrast. Lloyd is not half bad enough to care for a nice girl! His style is quite different, oh, quite!"

Lloyd laughed at the highway robbery of his character, but it was Mrs. Reynolds who came to his defence, saying:

"He must have more than one style then, for he is devoted to you and Clare, and you are as unlike as——"

"The aureolas on those painted saints in the crypt that Lloyd does not care for!" struck in Gertie, to finish out the comparison. "Some of them are

made of suns and stars, others seemed to have a preference for roses and ivy; oak leaves wrought in wreaths are also popular with them, and garlands in tracery. I am going to copy some of them when I get back to the Rue de la Paix, for evening coiffure."

Gertie warmed to her theme as she progressed, which would have occurred to Father Benardino as irreverent, but was only characteristic to her present audience.

"In these warm, still days when even 'Sister Lark' does not sing, one gets a little the feeling of the clock having permanently stopped here," said Lloyd. "I fancy I should be glad to see Biancha flashing around the house again—she lent a lively bit of colour to our studies in still life."

"There is no one left to flash but Paolo, and he will soon be a friar of the Minor Observance, whatever depressing thing that may be!" sighed Gertie. "There is not even a cardinal nowadays to cut the gloom."

Mrs. Reynolds' face was very grave. She had aged in these last weeks; she felt it in the incommunicable presentiment of her own soul more than she showed it by the external features presented to the scrutiny of the careless world. Gertie never joked her now about her juvenile activities; the

springtide energy in her, too, seemed over. It was a sadder face she turned on Lloyd than was her wont to show those with whom she was most unreservedly intimate. Even her rare collection of photographs of the youthful Tobias and the angels, which she had sought all over Europe, failed to bring the accustomed light to her eyes to-day. She put up a restraining hand as Gertie leaned over her to compare the star-eyed Tobias so familiar to all frequenters of the *Belli Arti* in Florence, to the older one of De Cosimo in the *Pinakothek* at Munich.

"Less brilliant in conception and colour," was her rapid verdict.

"But so dear and unhesitating!" said her aunt tenderly.

"The tired little dog has turned white in the one from trying to keep up, I suppose," said Lloyd joining them.

"The dog in the Venetian Tobias had already given it up, I remember," said Gertie. "He fagged to a mere wisp of himself in this trayal."

Mrs. Reynolds held up another. "I came to one in Verona, absolutely unexpectedly; it gave me a thrill, like that of meeting a dear, lost friend. The richness and gloom of that ancient church at Santa Maria in Organo. I shall never forget

the glowing faith of that upturned face shone out to me!"

"Nothing adds such a zest to desultory travel as the collecting mania," said Gertie reflectively. "That same season when Aunt Jessica was hard after her Tobias, Clare was keen on Sibyls, and I began collecting angels; but I got tired of them and gave it up. I rather wish I had not now. They were superb, some of them. Kneeling and 'announcing,' and supporting the dead and bearing lilies and crowns and generally playing their allotted parts with a gusty grace."

"Look at them, dear; don't touch them!" begged her aunt, as Gertie caught up De Cosimo's masterpiece and began to fan herself with it, and she hastily replaced them in their separate envelopes even as she spoke. They always insisted that Mrs. Reynolds was miserly with her photographs. She bought them till her trunks refused to carry more unless her wardrobe was to be left behind, stifled her conscience by announcing that they were intended for gifts to appreciative friends at home, but neither Christmas nor birthday drew them away from her gloating possession, though her gifts of every other description were unspeakably lavish.

"None of the others approach the Botticelli," decided Gertie, as her aunt held it up once more for

their appreciation before she laid it back among its fellows.

They all stood gazing at the well-known grouping, the windy progress of the three angels that seem half-blowing, half-marching over the hill-tops toward the sunset, little Tobias keeping stride by inspiration, and the firm hand of the calm seraph that clasped his childish hand in hers.

"Isn't St. Michael magnificent!" cried Gertie, with a deep breath of sheer admiration.

"They are setting a great pace," agreed Lloyd. "A nice determined looking band of kidnapers to send after one little lad out fishing!"

They were still absorbed in their contemplation of the picture when Clare stepped out upon the balcony. She was dressed entirely in white, as usual. She had worn nothing else since Count Variani's death, perhaps in mourning symbol or in anticipation of the novitiate's robe. On her face there was no faintest betrayal of the wakeful hours of revelation and decision. Her hair seemed a trifle more lustrous than common, the burnished waves curved away from her brow and neck with a shining grace all her own. She came among them just as she had come on uncounted mornings, yet her step had in it something that made Mrs. Reynolds' heart quicken and led her to raise her eyes question-

ingly just in time to intercept the glance Clare gave to Lloyd in return for his morning greeting. For a second only their eyes held, then she had turned away to Gertie. The mother's hope sickened. This was the issue then, their waiting was over. Clare's decision was taken, and that brief glance meant a plea for gentle judgment from the one she was most vitally to wound—took farewell forever.

No one knew better than her mother how implacable Clare could be when her course was laid out by her own desire. If she had voluntarily taken this course she would hold to it over red-hot ploughshares—until it was too late; then regret and panic would drive her back to common sense again.

Never had she looked more radiant. It was one of her rare moments of inspired beauty when her spirit seemed burning through her transparent body. It agonised her mother; Lloyd turned sharply away. He too divined the change and interpreted the cause with a fierce catch of pain in his breast. Her face smote him with the uselessness of his wasted love and bitter resentment for the ugliness of the sacrifice about to be consummated; an offering to the proselyting ambition of the ubiquitous Jesuit. Gertie stood staring at Clare as if actually in awe of her self-reliant poise, wondering what had trans-

formed her, bringing the unreal yet vital uplift to her listless face.

"You look as if you had been walking with Tobias on the house tops!" she exclaimed. "And as if the white clouds had come off on you!" she added.

Clare, in her turn, bent over the photograph of the immortal little Tobias, and her eyes lifted to her mother's. She had not realised how worn that dearest face had grown. Why, in the mazy æsthetics of religious experiment had she turned blind eyes upon the simplest ethics of the sublime duty of a child toward its mother? She drew herself up to her slender height again, and the smile she gave them was light to those waiting hearts that so loved her and hoped for her.

"Why should we not all go with them, over the house tops, as Gertie says?" she asked simply. "Why not just put our hands into the hand of the dominant angel and go? Even as Tobias? I am ready."

Gertie gave a little shriek of hysterical relief, and snapping off a long branch of oleander, struck the pose of the blowing angel that walks alone in Botticelli's conception; starting across the piazza at a swinging gait as if to march over the intervening Umbrian hills and valleys to the very portals of America.

"Come on!" she cried, holding out her hand, but Clare had slipped hers into that of her mother while she spoke:

"This is the angel I know best, Gertie, I am going to let her lead me over the world wherever she will."

The strain was broken by Gertie's canticle of triumph,

"From tombs and crypts and cypress trees—
From minor friars and weary knees—
From pallid saints and stern decrees—
Dear World, deliver us from these!"

Before the truth had really impressed itself upon them and the significance of Clare's decision, the peasant girl who had supplanted Biancha appeared bearing a yellow telegram, true to the universal colour of Assisi.

"For the Signora," she stammered, but presenting it to Lloyd, in true European fashion ignoring the ability of a female to accept the responsibility of such an event as a telegram, if her superior fellow-creature was in the vicinity. He handed it to Gertie, who preserved a rather stony face as she read, and would have left them in non-committal indifference, implying that it was all a matter of no importance, had not Lloyd intercepted her:

"Own up, Gertie; it's from Donald. What does he say? Play fair, now!"

She threw it toward him and made her escape, but he waved it around his head delightedly, shouting the contents after her as she ran. It was from Donald, sent off on the immediate receipt of her own concise message.

“Hold the world, it’s reeling. Started.”

Only once afterward did Mrs. Reynolds sound Clare on the grounds of her choice.

“Do you want to tell me how you came to yourself or not, dear?” she had asked frankly. And Clare with equal frankness had replied:

“If I owe it to you for the havoc I have made of your life of late, yes——”

But she was not allowed to finish.

“No, you need say nothing; neither now nor at any future time. It is not my wish. The incident is closed between us.”

“Then I would rather not,” said Clare, with gratitude, and Mrs. Reynolds never surmised, in all the after years, that Clare had been silent, not to cover her own unadmirable vacillation, but to protect the honour of the priest who had been to her almost divine, and still claimed her allegiance and fundamental affinity.

CHAPTER XX

THE MODERN PROMETHEUS

DURING the next interval of existence Lloyd smiled broadly at the world and trod lightly, as one who feels the swing of the universe under his feet. He complimented Madame of the Evasio until she changed her mind about him completely, and from considering him a surly fellow, accorded him the title of a perfect gentleman, believing him at last overpowered by the charms of Assisi and the peculiar attractions of the hostlery she provided there. She forgave him for never flattering her kitchen when he assured her that her house possessed advantages over all Umbria, and probably the entire known world, in that the quiet was to be found only in the Garden of Eden before the creation of Eve; confiding to her in the next breath that he could truly say he had never left any spot on earth with more emotion—the nature of which he left her to infer.

He chatted constantly and in a high key to the Swiss *concierge*, and would have given him half his wardrobe as a token of parting, save for the grotesque confusion of sizes and modes that must

have ensued. The *concierge* was abusive of his own fate that held him yet a fortnight in Assisi, and begged Lloyd to go to Lugano later, where he would surely find him at the door of a real hotel. Of course Lloyd promised gaily. Lugano—anything, once out of Assisi!

“It is at the door of the Bella Vista you will see me standing when the ’bus arrives from the train sir, a hotel, you understand, signor, not a tomb—like this so forgotten establishment!” he reiterated.

“Oh, I shall find you all right!” Lloyd assured him cheerfully, and for the minute he wanted to and thought with careless cordiality that he should in the sheer intoxication of leaving.

“It was only for sake of Madame the Padrona of the Evasio that I am come,” explained the Swiss becoming confidential in his tone. “But to become even proprietor of an *albergo* like this is not worth the dangers of a wife, eh, Monsieur?” And he winked knowingly at Lloyd as he dropped in French, who nodded wisely in his turn, as if the two knew the world and women too well to be easily ensnared. “Now is never the best time to marry as Monsieur comprehends well,—perfectly; the world is more gay seen *en garçon!* A man may always marry; time will always be long enough to satisfy the appetite for the domestic life——”

Italy had perverted him sadly.

"That is true enough for a fine wide-chested, broad-shouldered soldier like you, but some of us better make our hay before the frost catches us!"

Objected Lloyd.

The *concierge* drew himself back until his white waistcoat almost strained apart, and gave himself a complacent review in the tiny mirror by the door, then remembering his manners he bowed obsequiously, saying: "For m'sieur, it is always summer!"

Lloyd accepted the compliment frankly, with a gay wave of the hand.

Gertie, meeting him on the stairs with her arms full of her regathered belongings that had inconsequently fallen out of her window above, accused him of acting like a drunken man.

"Why do you go round smiling so broadly all the time at the weather?" she demanded.

"It is smiling weather!" he replied.

"Well, if you are going to give everybody in Assisi fifty lira, you will involve the rest of us in immediate bankruptcy. Can't you hold yourself in a little, till we got off?"

"Let me tip them all for you," he offered handsomely. "No, I can't hold myself in, and I won't! Donald meets us at Geneva. He can begin to do

the munificent there; he will be just in the mood for it," he added slyly.

Gertie's mouth twitched. She tried hard not to smile, but in spite of her it would go rippling all over her face, making her eyes dance and shine.

"Glad it is smiling weather in your world too!" he cried.

"Well, we have had enough of the other sort," she admitted. "Clare is in one of her sibyline moods again to-day, but she is packing with her head down in the bottom of her trunks, thank God!—like any other ordinary mortal. She will be ready to enact Tobias by to-morrow. I wish she had taken the hand of St. Michael," she said very low; "but it does not appear to matter much to you."

Lloyd's smile vanished, leaving a very set visage behind it.

"Nothing matters except what is right; and I am used to waiting," he said.

"Now, Lloyd!" She turned to him as seriously as was compatible with her slippery load of random property falling about her on the narrow wooden stairs. "I do so want you to be happy!" she protested. "And what a woman wants, God wants, the proverb says; but don't sit around and be faithful! There's nothing so losing in the end as that!

For mercy's sake, be rude, be cruel, be jealous,—false, anything but faithful! Make her feel; make her afraid; worry her to death with uncertainty! If you are going to count on just being faithful, you will end by sitting there till the wind up of time holding your own hands while the wedding march is being played inside—for someone else!”

“Is this the advice you will also give Donald?”

“He will never need it. He did not pretend to be faithful; it was just my being afraid that he would not be that distracted me into such a hurry. I never could have cared for a tame man. He is as elusive as——”

“You are,—yourself! In short, keeps you guessing?” interrupted Lloyd. “Now here is a proverb for you, Gertie,—don't forget it. There are as many kinds of women in the world as there are halos in the crypt. I will mention your preference to Donald, though. How good it will be to see a man again!”

“Yes, won't it?” agreed Gertie, overlooking his rudeness cleverly.

“We shall have some superb tramps together and make some high ascents, he and I. He is a famous climber——”

“Oh, indeed, will you?” said Gertie, with a cynical elevation of eyebrows. “Swiss government

is proverbial,—I am intending to begin mine there,—on the spot!”

“I don’t believe you will ever marry him—I have not the slightest idea that you think you will,” exclaimed Lloyd incredulously. “Do you?”

“Well, I admit I have noticed that a girl who has not married usually does not begin,” said Gertie thoughtfully.

“But your notion is that if they once begin they keep on? That is flattery for the downtrodden male!”

She left him laughing, and he called after her: “Those the men love marry young! Don’t you forget that you are not to throw over the finest chap in two hemispheres for nonsense!” shaking his fist at her menacingly as she disappeared.

Clare’s mood was silenter than theirs, yet she shared the pleasant enthusiasm surrounding their preparations for departure. In the brief interval left her she scarcely saw Father Benardino. The psychology of their relation made any attempt an explanation between them unnecessary—would accept her decision, believing her deflected from some scruple of Protestantism and how could she undeceive him without the confession wrung from Paolo against his conception of his sacred obligation?

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to go from him without a full understanding. She longed to reinstate herself with him, to tell him all her heart and beg him to think her less worldly and unworthy than he must if she went away in the silence that condemned her. Yet instinct told her the latter course was the only one, would leave less of an open wound to heal in the remorseful afterward. What Father Benardino had become to her, she could hardly define to herself more than she could define what his religion as he represented it had become to her. At moments she blessed Paolo for rescuing her from a fatal mistake, and again she sighed for the lost ignorance which had so nearly enveloped her in the blissful participation of the protecting church, so intimately bound up with the personality of the priest who had realised her ideal. Whatever life might give her in the future, this vision of a holier life was hers forever, to haunt her by its standard of supernatural perfection and the beauty of its celebrations. His power over her as the soul-inspired arbiter of her destiny was broken by the certainty of his having withheld the truth of Lloyd's innocence from her, but it was replaced by the mastery of his charm and blind devotion to her best fulfilment of herself. The idea of omitting him from her life forever was an impossibility, beyond her present will. She

hell, was eternally to reassert its power, eternally to renew its command, through the agency of a directing human priest? He was not by nature tyrannical nor was he mystical; he was simply human and humanly simple.

Her honesty, at once the curse and jewel of her untrained soul, foresaw that ruin lay in any acceptance of temporary conditions. She must give herself unreservedly if at all, whether to the suppliant love of an honest man or to the antagonistic worship of the divine Lover.

All the priest's counsels toward the narrow salvation only possible to her through the Church of Rome, a salvation that bade her leave the tenderest ties as were they the very instruments of the Evil One, if so be her own soul but escape contamination, aroused in her the Puritan spirit of contradiction. Reckless of her own selfish well-being, she would have merged herself in the fate of a man she wholly loved, whatever his crime, in a splendid impulse of self-annihilation that seemed to give the lie to the Catholic's painstaking casuistry in consideration of her own soul's individual welfare and ultimate safety.

Love, life and the Crucifixion, shared in mystical emotion, was the overpowering plea of the priest whose wisdom was set to countermand her heresy.

To Clare only conscience was infallible. How should he steal that infidelity from her? The fair-haired girl had, from the first, been a bitter antagonist to the egotism of his faith. She, with her inadequate conception of unselfishness and consequent ignorance of utter subjection,—that vertebrate column of the Catholic Church,—facing the inevitable submission of Catholicism, unwarmed by the human love that lifts daily abnegation to blissful duty, sacrifice to joy!

Intrenched in her vaunted independence, her honest misery, she had felt the comfort of the church at various, lonely mile-stones. She had accepted the rich solace in her desolation, she had watched its working with admiration and contempt. She had revolted and softened, longed for and loathed, envied and pitied the priest for his conviction; been won and estranged in turn. And out of it all had evolved a passionate will to spend herself in exacting devotion to manifest duty. Her moral sense quickened as in one whose scheme of life and death contained no satisfying doctrine of forgiveness as its hope or palliation for service left undone. Faith, in the hues of a dove, and incense-veiled, withdrew before its invigorating counterpart—works.

Love had deceived her; the priest had all but

deceived her into his own plan of salvation at the price of Lloyd's honour. She was going from Assisi conscious that moral integrity once stifled by human love had been again threatened by divine temptation. Before the unshrouded bigotry and supersition of her chosen guide, she stood at last intolerant and alone—an outcast.

Father Benardino was very pacific, almost supernatural in his sublime pity for her. For her, open-minded, self-reliant, undeceived; her free will her only creed. To him, she is a poor maimed creature powerless to let herself be restored. And is she triumphant? Does she glory in her superiority over the weak-minded devotee? Is she tranquil in her self-sufficiency? Is she happy to stand aloof and free?

No. Freedom is an awful possession to her now. A terrific venture. She stands on this high headland of her soul's experience as one looking out over a wide expanse of uncharted destiny. Free, but without wings. Free, but unsure of a goal. Free, aye, but trammelled by the consciousness of duty to home, to lover, and to God.

Meantime the early summer flowers ran like a glad refrain in the keys of reminiscent April and of youth unheeded; for scenery had ceased to be scenery, and become mood; breathing inspired mood

for the lurking error that gave to this conversion a vital sweetness more necessary to him than vision, more real than prayer.

But if in the shallows of the clairvoyant night, in those hours when the blood ebbs so calmly that one may count the impulse of one's being unper- turbed by the racking emotions of the active day— if then the Jesuit perceived the flaw in his own doctrine, he alone was aware. He was great enough to accept his chastening; humble in his sincerity. Baffled at first by his unanswered pleading, his faith provided for the refusal of Heaven by the argument of his own unworthiness. He had be- lieved himself the chosen instrument; Heaven had prostrated him for his own audacity. To the mighty heart of the church this child would be drawn in good time,—in God's time,—though he might himself be exiled to islands of the sea or mountain monasteries of unbroken silence and never know till death set all spirits free in the com- munion of ultimate redemption. He had sinned through pride and self-will. Now his petition was that God give her the faith by any instrumentality at his own pleasure; for himself,

“‘Hold Thou the cross before my sinful eyes!’”

he besought: humiliated yet adoring. If Clare had

m to her to wait for her finding only in the Old world and old faith. Then the real struggle would come, when forgetfulness had blurred all that she had crossed her will and disenchanting her contenting. Lloyd's devotion to her had in it something almost cloistral, in that he set her apart and gave her as the worship of his life. He would never waver in this, yet the mother thought of him without complete assurance, for she was too old a player on life's stage not to be aware that there is nothing once so helpless and so hopeless as a beautiful girl's ability.

Clare was so unlike the easily appeased women of the *mondaine* stamp. She questioned the order of the created universe, might even carry her rebellion toward existing conditions farther; might depart utterly from all the common happiness that she was satisfied and had to satisfy the race. Externally Mrs. Reynolds acquiesced in their departure with no display of latent distrust; treating the tactical nearness of Clare's moral crisis and future uncertainty as if it did not exist. At heart she was not at ease. The issue had been deferred, not dismissed, in her clear-seeing estimation. She understood Clare, with her insatiable nature craving new stimulants and hesitating before no exotic experiment of mind or spirit. And she had comprehended

the Jesuit sufficiently to know that time played only a minor part in the endless drama of his purposes.

So anxious were they all to turn the leaf of their Assisan springtime that each privately dreaded some unforeseen assembling of deterrent circumstances to prevent their flitting on the appointed hour. Gertie was so sure there would be a tempest that she was out of bed every few minutes of the preceding night to menace the heavens if they but threatened to scowl back at her. Lloyd had ordered Antonio over night from Perugia, and kept him from getting drunk to incapacity, by personal vigilance, to prevent his oversleeping and causing a moment's delay. Mrs. Reynolds, serenely busy with her *las* straps and keys, showed no uneasiness, but knew a nicety how the night wore on toward day.

And after all auspicious omens and prophetic provisions, they did not get off as agreed, for Fat Benardino was invisible and Clare would not leave without his farewell.

It was late afternoon before he appeared, and visions of another night had risen to confront and turning Gertie absolutely haggard with rapt disappointment. Hilarity had wasted to nervous tension.

He came among them unconcerned and kind, as upon that first far-away day

April shower. At a nod from Mrs. Reynolds, Lloyd disappeared to summon Antonio, and the rest busied themselves about the disposal of their small luggage, Gertie's yellow bag, brave in its multitudinous labels, prominently perched atop as usual.

Their adieux were spoken with protests of regard and conventional regret, heightened in Mrs. Reynolds' case by the respect and esteem each had reason to cherish for the other. His bow to Gertie was that of a courtier, his handshake with Lloyd such as characterises the hollow cordiality of duellists about to strike.

Clare had stepped back to the balcony for one last survey of the Umbrian valley. She took her parting from him here.

"Could you not come sometime?" she had entreated at the last, with hope in her heart newly roused by the need his presence stirred within her. "Have you no will to come?"

"My will is the will of my order," he replied, with his subduing eyes fixed upon the ground.

"If you knew how much you have helped me, how terribly I shall want your help——" Her voice broke.

"My daughter, to have what we want is riches, to be able to go without is power."

They called her, and as she turned to go he

raised his ineffable eyes to hers and made the sign of the cross between them. She did not move until he traced it once more, this time in blessing above her shining head.

“You will come back, my daughter; you cannot stay away!” he cried.

“Who knows, my Father, who knows?” she said as she turned away, a dry sob clutching at her throat.

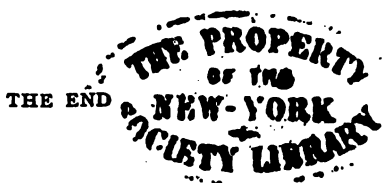
And so they left him. And not until they had swept around the turn below the familiar gardens could she command herself to raise her eyes, and when she did it was not toward the little group of distractedly waving hands at the *albergo* Evasio or toward the towering basilica of St. Francis, but to the solitary figure framed in by the weather-beaten arch of the cloister. A black outline against the yellow sky that tokens a windy morrow—happier in his voluntary imprisonment than they in their absolute freedom, the liberty conferred upon them having in its essential quality less of peace than the confinement to which his soul was invisibly bound by the despotism of dogma and tradition. Freedom undirected possesses so much less of power than that of an ideal changeless and bleak—however terse its restrictions and tyrannical its frontier.

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So they went, and he remained. They, venturing as a latter-day Columbus in search of goldener spheres; he enduring as a modern Prometheus whose chains were laid upon him by the grim incontrovertible decree of Deity.

And over and under the grey waves and in the hoarse chant of the winds, as their ship ploughed its path across the estranging sea, Clare heard his voice in those last ominous words of farewell:

“You will come back, my daughter; you cannot stay away.” And her heart echoed by day and by night her own response: “Who knows, my Father, who knows?”



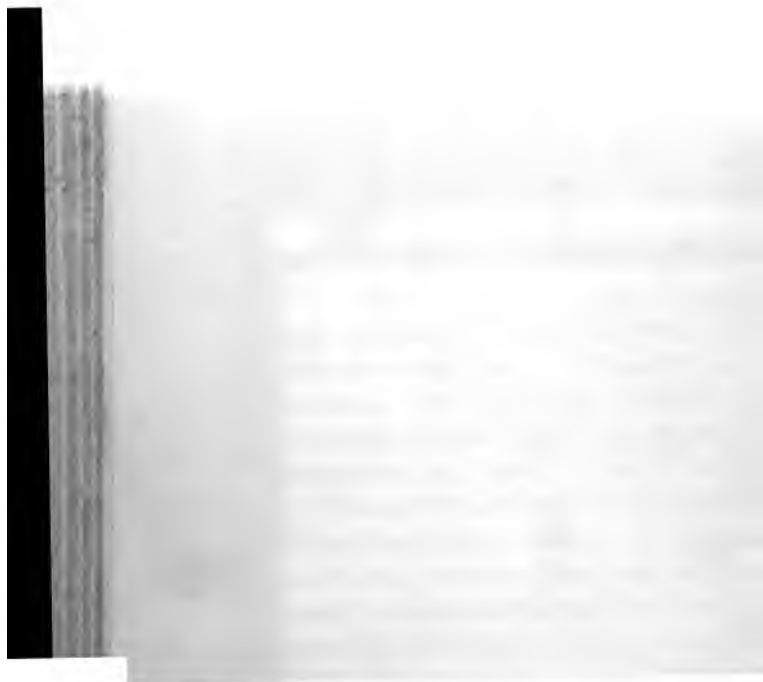








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